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Lilith

vol. 39, no. 1 • spring 2014

*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**

16
New Feminist Ritual! A Little Girl's First Haircut
by Alanna E. Cooper
The author recasts *upsherin*, the traditional boy's coming-of-toddlerhood ceremony, for her three girls.

19
The Refusal of Time: Visiting the *Old* Old
A social worker on her unlikely half-day friendship with a demented charge; a Florida yakker on her ball-busting butcher-mom in the Old Country; fail-safe & *haimish* prompts for your next *hajj* to the nursing-home, and what Grandma did with those Nazi bedsheets.

Wordless Tea
by Liat Katz
"Go check on Gramma," my father said.
by Gayle Ann Weinstein
Reading "Dear Abby" in Massachusetts
by Jayne Lambert, as told to Susan Schnur
The Gingham Dresses
by Alisha Kaplan

26
Disability Opression
Author Susan Nussbaum, paraplegic and a fierce activist for girls in chairs, tells Susan Weidman Schneider why "access" is just another term for disability oppression.

30
Born Out of Wedlock
by Liana Finck
At the turn of the [last] century, Jewish immigrants wrote for advice to the Yiddish Forward. In *A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York*, Finck graphically envisions the mini-dramas these letters limn.

34
Same Page, Seven Years Later
by Ilana Kurshan
Juggling three children under age three and her publishing job, she breaks her arm. Kurshan reflects: "In order to heal, bones have to set, and so I find myself wondering what has set in my life in the time between my two encounters with the Talmud tractate Yoma."

36
The Young Suffragist's Diagnosis
fiction by Ayelet Waldman
Plus…Waldman talks about the drama folded into her new novel: corset-shedding early European feminists, tender Freud-era psychoanalysis, looted art, the complex schemes of post-Holocaust Zionism, and the family life of Syrian Jews.

3
From the Editor
Susan Weidman Schneider on women's new silence about our friendships.

4
Voices
Let's talk about sex • Dara Horn on siblings and forgiveness • Shulamit Aloni shaped civil rights in Israel • Losing Loehmann's • and more

12
In the Desert
a short story by Sarah Seltzer

15
Written on Matzoh
a poem by Sarah Antine

38
Reviews
Naomi Danis praises Lore Segal • Rabbi Chana Thompson Shor compares two edgy books on social justice • Judy Batalion dissects novels about Jewish Brits • Eleanor J. Bader reads the confessions of a midwife • and more

46
Happening
compiled by Naomi Danis
Your resource guide.

48
Reluctantly Becoming a Jewish Filmmaker
by Amy Stone
Hungarian filmmaker Diana Groó sees herself as part of a "traumatized third generation" of Jews who refused to speak about their past. She's breaking that mold with her bold new films.

COVER PHOTO: SUZANNE PLUNKETT

"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."

—Nessa Rapoport

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Wait for it. There's a lot in this issue about bringing sex into our conversations. People with disabilities, for example, and why they get portrayed as non-sexual beings—with notable exceptions in Susan Nussbaum's new novel. The danger of silence around teen sex, for another example (and kudos to the Orthodox rabbi who recently told parents and educators how to talk to Orthodox teen boys about wet dreams and not feeling sinful…). All good.

But how about that other subject we don't address? Women have mostly stopped talking about our friendships. This is a sea-change for feminists! This is underexamined fallout from the lean-in era, buried in all the high-octane chatter about work-life balance.

After a recent, long-overdue, much-postponed lunch with a close friend—one with whom I've exchanged confidences, earth-shattering feminist insights and birthday gifts for 35 years—I began to worry about how significantly our work lives have foiled our friendships. Every week is strewn with missed opportunities for seeing this woman, though she and I never really talk about why.

Without our friendships, feminism loses steam.

Think of how often we say to friends—people we actually *like*—"I'd love to, but I'm on deadline. I'd love to, but I'm drowning in work." Women caring for young children find themselves in mandatory chats with contemporaries in the playground, at the soccer game, wherever, that give rise to closeness. And for women living in Sabbath-observant worlds, where Shabbat enforces many occasions for women-to-women socializing, the work-driven diminution of contact with close women friends may not feel as profound.

But many others of us feel we have pulled the plug on our friendships. When we cheer women's advancement in the workplace, and see women accelerating into a career trajectory, we almost never calculate the cost in blown-off book club gatherings, coffee dates, drinks-and-dinner strategy sessions about politics large and small. One of the hidden losses in the lives of many women right now is the loss of time for female friends.

As the cycle of our work lives has expanded to 24:24 and 7:7, even the interstitial moments for conversation have shrunk concomitantly. A woman in her forties confesses to me that she and her friends connect around midnight, via email and text messages, while their children and partners are all sleeping. The only women whose lives we catch up with regularly seem to be our Facebook friends. Seriously, some weeks I know more about people to whom I am barely tangentially connected than I do about the sturm-und-drang in the lives of my *actual* BFFs.

The loss is more than personal. Not only is our delight diminished when work drives us away from our friends, but so is the movement for change that women's collective energies spur. In the early days of second-wave feminism, a lot of passion, analysis and intellectual energy went into acknowledging and honoring the bonds women feel for one another, our commonalities (whether of aspiration or oppression) and the ways that sisterly efforts were going to make the world a better place.

That was then. This is now.

Recognizing the power of face-to-face connections in this digital era, some women are discovering a new path to consciousness raising and female friendships. These are the women loving their Lilith salons, gathering in people's homes every three months or so, around the country, to see how their own lives are refracted through the pages of the magazine. These salons (see the inside back cover for details) are a forum for intergenerational contact and conversations, for honoring the relationships of the women in the room and for encouraging the possibilities of pleasure in the moment and social change down the line.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

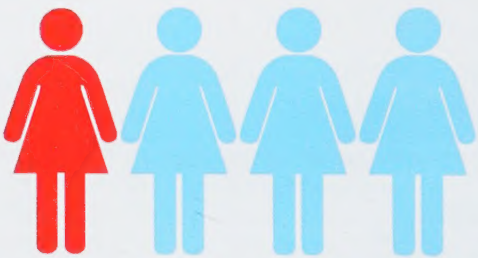
Traditionally, the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. Here, strong women's voices.

POLITICS NOW

Protecting Students from Campus Sexual Assaults

It was deeply moving to hear President Barack Obama tell victims of campus sexual assaults, "I've got your back." Survivors of sexual violence often encounter disbelief—especially from those authorities meant to protect them, like law enforcement officials and college administrators, according to reports filed by college students. Euphemistic language like "non-consensual sex" replaces "assault," and victims field questions like "Are you *sure* it was rape?" On January 25, President Obama announced the creation of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. What prompted this? The President credited "an inspiring wave of student-led activism, and a growing number of students who found the courage to come forward and report attacks...and we owe all these brave young people an extraordinary debt of gratitude." I know exactly who those brave young people are. I myself am a tiny cog in the collective efforts that brought the campus sexual assault "epidemic" to the President's attention.

Ninety percent of campus rapes will be perpetrated by acquaintances. However, as a 2007 study reports, only 12 percent of college rape survivors will report their experience to law enforcement authorities. Activism surrounding campus sexual assault intensified in 2012, as students filed Title IX complaints against Yale, Swarthmore, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Amherst, Occidental, and others. Title IX is part of the U. S. Education Amendments of 1972, a law best known for prohibiting the exclusion of women from university athletics. But Title IX protection includes the right to an education free from sexual violence, since this obviously hinders a person's education—illegal under Title IX.



One in four women have survived rape or attempted rape.

With this protection in mind, students started the "IX Network" (IX spoken as "nine"), a Facebook group which evolved into several groups: for campus assault survivors of color, LGBTQ survivors, survivors of intimate partner violence, and others. Because of anti-violence organizing I did at the University of Maryland, where I was an undergraduate—**Lauren Redding** and I successfully petitioned the university senate to mandate sexual assault prevention education for all incoming students—I was invited into this umbrella group. Through Hillel, I also started a

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK. DIAGRAM: ONEINFOURUSA.ORG

REMEMBERING

Shulamit Aloni (1928-2014): The Conscience of Israel

Shulamit Aloni, the person who virtually single-handedly introduced human rights, civil liberties and respect for diversity into Israeli public life, passed away on January 24, at the age of 85.

A patriot, visionary and leader, for close to 50 years she was a formidable presence on the country's political scene. No other woman has been as innovative, no other woman has been as controversial, and no other woman has had such a transformative effect on Israeli political discourse

She started her career as a teacher, specializing in Hebrew language and biblical studies (her knowledge of the Jewish sources was prodigious; her use of Hebrew a pleasure to the ears of even her most vehement critics). With the completion of a law degree in the mid-1950s, she became increasingly concerned with civic issues, gradually forging her humanistic Israeli worldview: a mixture of deep pride in her Jewish identity and profound commitment to individual rights and social justice.

In the Israel of the 1950s and 1960s—and even more so after 1967—Shulamit Aloni's liberal democratic vision was nothing short of revolutionary. Aloni began to make her mark hosting a radio talk show on consumer rights and writing columns on civil and women's rights in leading newspapers (she was a path-breaking feminist even before the term was coined). Shulamit Aloni is the only woman in Israel's history to successfully establish a party with a durable political presence.

Unsparing in her critique of intolerance, prejudice and injustice and exceptional in her ability to lash out against their perpetrators, Aloni developed as large a cadre of antagonists as of supporters. A person of large ideas and broad strokes, she had little patience for details. Notably unsentimental, she did not suffer fools or hypocrites lightly. A fun-loving person with wide horizons, she scorned narrow-mindedness and despised opportunism on all parts of the political spectrum. Ultimately, Aloni paid the price for her lack of political guile—first losing her position as Minister of Education and then, in 1996, as the leader of Meretz, the party she founded.

During the last 18 years of her life she continued to struggle for the Israel she believed in: one that would embody the values of human decency and live up to the humanistic historical and cultural Jewish underpinnings which she held so dear. Until

her death, she constituted the moral compass and provided the principled leadership that the left, which she helped to form, so sorely lacked after she retired from formal politics. Her legacy remains deeply embedded in the Israeli body politic. By designing the contours of a just Israel and doing her utmost to translate this vision into reality, she has left an indelible—and yet unrealized—imprint on this country.

NAOMI CHAZAN

For more: The Times of Israel, January 26, 2014, as "Shulamit Aloni: The Conscience of a Nation."

Jewish feminist group—JFem—that hosted programs on the meaning of consent, and text study on sexual assault in the Torah and Talmud.

A "Know Your IX" campaign (at *knowyourix.org*) educates about student rights and university responsibilities under this law. If sexual assault does occur, universities have a responsibility to address the needs of the survivor swiftly. In the past, reports reveal, victims of campus sexual assault were "counseled" to take time off from their studies to recover, and suffered consequences of the assault psychologically, physically and professionally, whereas their assaulters seldom found their academic trajectory or future careers impeded. In the past, the Department of Education has failed to punish a university for institutional violations, so a Know Your IX campaign, ED Act Now, last year delivered a petition with over 175,000 signatures to the Department of Education, demanding enforcement.

Ali Safran, a senior at Mt. Holyoke, is hopeful. "I think the White House Task Force has made great first steps in reaching out for survivor input, mainly through online listening sessions and the ability to submit questions to the Task Force via email. I hope they take the survivors' stories seriously."

REBECCA KREVAT

Member of Knesset **Merav Michaeli**—who with others proposed that a woman may be appointed director-general of Israel's rabbinic courts—had plenty to say, in a New Israel Fund email, about International Women's Day 2014:

"A world that listens to women's voices would be a world in which there is zero tolerance for rape and sexual violence; a world in which sexuality is personal choice and not a commodity; a world that helps and supports young girls and boys and the families that raise them."

SHULAMIT ALONI PHOTO: YOSSI GURWITZ

CULTURE WATCH

Human Rights Plays Rooted in Dark French Books

Award-winning playwright **Catherine Filloux** credits her grandmother and her high school with kick-starting her interest in human rights and feminism. And the duality has led her to write more than 20 internationally produced plays and libretti.

Filloux recalls that when she was very young her paternal grandmother, living in France, would read aloud to her during visits. "Although I grew up in San Diego, French was my first language, and my grandmother used to read these dark French books to me," Filloux begins. "I remember one, *Francois Le Bossu*, Francis the Hunchback, by **Comtesse De Segur**. It was very old, published in 1930, and was about a disabled boy. It asked the reader to empathize. There was a lot of dialogue in the book, with characters speaking in turn, as if in a play."

Later, as a high school student in the late 1970s, Filloux began studying the Holocaust. "For me, the Holocaust stands as a catastrophic watershed moment that we'll never put behind us," she continues. "My paternal grandparents, who were not Jewish, lived in Occupied France and participated in the Resistance. They took in a Jewish boy who lived with them for years; my uncle, my father's brother, was also active. When we studied this history in school we learned the phrase 'never again,' but what do these words mean when genocides continue to happen in other parts of the world? That's the big question, and it refuses to go away."

In fact, it forms the crux of Filloux's 2005 play *Lemkin's House*, pictured here. The drama is about **Raphael Lemkin**, [1900–1959] the Polish-Jewish attorney credited with coining the term genocide and with drafting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, first presented to the United Nations in 1948. "I learned about Lemkin from **Samantha Powers**' 2002 book, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. Lemkin became like a soul mate for me," Filloux explains. "Early on, before Hitler became powerful, Lemkin went to his family and told them, 'We have to leave. Something terrible is going to happen here.' They refused, thinking they'd be fine in their village." The upshot was that Lemkin lost 49 family members—everyone except one brother.

Despite these compelling facts, Filloux was not interested in writing Lemkin's biography. Instead, she says that she began by imagining Lemkin's death, and opens the play with him in limbo. "It's a surreal look at his situation," she says. "He has survivor's guilt and is haunted by both his mother and the genocides in Bosnia and other places. Among other things, the play is about forgiving himself for leaving his family behind."

Filloux's other plays tackle cultural dislocation, immigration, honor killing, mourning, rape, and political activism. "Eyes of the Heart" addresses the plight of 150 Cambodian women, imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge, who became psychosomatically blind in response to the horrors they'd witnessed; "Dog and Wolf" focuses on the mass killings in Bosnia. "Memory can be revolutionary," Filloux says. "By remembering you can plant seeds for change. Acknowledging vast suffering—remembering, retelling and re-acknowledging—asks an audience to empathize, to somehow get involved."

That said, Filloux is adamant that her plays are not overtly political. "They're character-driven stories," she says, and while humor sometimes peeks out, she emphasizes that she writes about topics that demand attention.

Why plays instead of journalism or narrative accounts? "I'm drawn to the collaborative aspect, to the physical embodiment of characters onstage so that the writing lives in a community, through the audience."

ELEANOR J. BADER

Catherine Filloux (*catherinefilloux.com*) will be leading an international playwright retreat in Italy August 1–August 10, 2014, for the La MaMa Umbria International. "Selma '65" will receive its world premiere from September 25th to October 12th, 2014, at La MaMa in New York City.

Anna Holmes on what we've really learned from the authors of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Harriet the Spy*:

"Harper Lee and Louise Fitzhugh taught their readers that difference, nonconformity, and even subversion should be celebrated in young girls. These qualities are the prerequisites for, and not the enemies of, creativity, curiosity, and insight."

in "The Good Bad American Girl" on The New Yorker blog, March 7, 2014.

LEMKIN'S HOUSE PHOTO: SUE REES

Memory, History, Siblings

Rachel Gordan speaks with author **Dara Horn**

DH: When I was a child I had a fantasy of recording everything, of writing everything down so that nothing could ever be lost. I still keep journals and notebooks. But in recent years, social media has made my childhood dream come true—and turned it into a nightmare. Watching everyone archiving their lunch online for the past five years has made me think more clearly about the distinction between memory and history.

I feel sorry for people younger than me (I'm 36), because they will never have a chance to meet a stranger. Everything they do will already be there for the world to see, and they won't have that chance to reinvent themselves by telling a new story about their past that suits their present needs. Of course, this is only an exponential updating of an ancient problem. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates complains about how the new technology—writing—is destroying memory, because now that people can just write things down, who will memorize the epics of Homer? He was right. Nobody memorizes Homer anymore, or their best friend's phone number either.

Technology always changes the way we consider the past. But the past isn't a story. It's a sequence of events that, once it's gone, can't be objectively accessed and can only be retold, in countless ways—and the way we choose to tell that story becomes our identity. There's a double helix of free will and fate that defines our lives—the circumstances we find ourselves in, and how we decide to remember those experiences.

RG: *Your novel* A Guide for the Perplexed *focuses on siblings—a relationship that often gets overlooked in the American Jewish community, where concerns about "continuity" lead to a preoccupation with the relationship between parents and children, and between grandparents and grandchildren. Your novel makes us think about siblings—the relationship about which there is least pressure to take responsibility. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer we usually come up with is no. Yet siblings may be the best family metaphor for an individual's relationship with her peers and her community.*

Our siblings are fellow travelers in life, keepers of the same memories. We grow up with our siblings, but we often expect to make different choices and take divergent paths. As adults, the "rules" about how to live with and love our brothers and sisters seem unclear. Jealousies and resentments from the past have the potential to weigh down these relationships, as your book beautifully explores. What sparked your interest in siblings and memory?

DH: That double helix of fate and free will I talked about earlier exists in microcosmic form for siblings who grew up together, in the form of the nature-versus-nurture debate. These are people who were raised in the same circumstances, but often you'd never know it, and their memories of their supposedly shared past are often very different. I grew up with two sisters and a brother, and the four of us are still very close as adults, but I appreciate how unusual that is. I also have four small children of my own, and I already see how they have their own world within my home that in large part doesn't include me.

The contemporary story in my novel is a rewriting of the Joseph story from Genesis, retold in contemporary times, and with women instead of men. The Joseph story is a perfect encapsulation of this question of destiny and free will. Joseph can see the future through dreams, but his story is not otherwise supernatural—it appears to take place entirely through human choices (his brothers sell him into slavery, his master's wife frames him for assault, etc.). Yet at the end, when his brothers reunite with him in Egypt and he reveals himself to them, he tells them, "Don't be angry at yourselves that you sold me to this place, because it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you"—turning his brother's crimes into a benevolent act of God! To me, this is an astonishing revision of history. But it's also illustrative of the kind of selective memory that's absolutely necessary in families and in all relationships. Forgiveness is always an act of fiction, and there is no more gracious act than creating that story.

From "Technology, Memory, and Jewish History," *ReligionandPolitics.org*, February 25, 2014.

THE FREE SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT AND LGBTS IN RUSSIA

The Free Soviet Jewry movement of the 1970s, which resettled Soviet Jews in North America, might be a model for helping LGBT people in Russia today gain freedom.

LGBT people in Russia are targeted for violent attacks in an increasingly hostile environment, which includes the attempt by Russian parliamentarians to strip LGBT parents of custodial rights.

"People want to flee. Daily discrimination includes people being harassed by neighbors, firing teachers, and taking children away from lesbian parents," Julie Dorf told the Bay Area Reporter.

In support of Russian LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco convened a meeting on how to help them. In the wake of that meeting, the Horizons Foundation will administer donations to organizations helping today's Russian refugees—this time LGBT people—to start over, in safety, in the Bay Area.

DARA HORN PHOTO: MICHAEL B. PRIEST

PRETTY SEXY SASSY

When **Diana** grows up, she hopes to be "pretty and sexy and sassy" just like the girls she sees on TV. The seven-year old, along with many other young girls and teens interviewed in "Pretty Sexy Sassy: How Girls and the Media Consume One Another," discusses the effect of female representation in the media on her self-esteem. This project was carried out by a cohort of Ma'yan Research Training Interns (RTIs)—Jewish girls from New York City high schools—and Nicole Solomon.

The film uses clips, interviews, media images, and existing research to analyze the impact of media sexism on girls and young women in an effort to create a "culture of awareness." Featured RTI **Ella**, 15, notes "I try to be everything that society tells me not to be. It makes me feel a lot more comfortable with my own identity." Ma'yan has released the video on *mayan.org*, and offers workshops and presentations using the video to prompt discussion. More information from Director of Research **Beth Cooper Benjamin** (beth@mayan.org).

Images from "Pretty Sexy Sassy."

WOMEN LEADING

Feminist developments in the wider culture have sometimes inspired greater opportunities for women in the Jewish community, as scholar Melissa R. Klapper points out in her 2013 book *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940*, which won a National Jewish Book Award in March.

- Klapper credits historian **Beth S. Wenger** with discovering that, immediately after the 1920 victory for women's right to vote in the U.S., "the members of the sisterhood of The Temple in Atlanta successfully demanded representation on the synagogue board. As they explained,

"in this age of woman's suffrage, the Sisterhood should demand the right to have a real working voice."

- Also from Klapper: "Temple Beth-El of Providence, Rhode Island, enlarged its board in 1921 to allow women to vote and hold office, and local Jewish communal leader **Marion Misch** won election as a trustee shortly thereafter. Misch firmly believed that

'Jewish women are…esteemed not only supreme in their households, but as direct agencies for influence upon the affairs of the time'."

Fast forward...

This spring, Naomi Adler is taking the helm as C.E.O. of the Philadelphia Jewish Federation, making this the only large-city federation headed by a woman.

We wish her well, and hope that her singularity is short-lived.

REMEMBERING

Losing Loehmann's

It feels like everyone has a Loehmann's story—or at least they did.

Like a hunter who proudly displays a deer head on the living room wall, many women with a Loehmann's purchase have a story behind the find. By March, 39 Loehmann's retail clothing locations closed. Loehmann's, like the grand resorts and bungalow colonies of the Catskills, will become a legend in American Jewish history. You could track the Jewish neighborhoods in America by the Loehmann's locations.

Losing Loehmann's is like losing a well-dressed aunt. There were parts of her that exposed your deepest insecurities, especially when she forced you to undress in a room full of strangers. But the love you had for this relative made you feel at home every time you walked through the door.

Harriet Mandel, a well-dressed lifelong Loehmann's shopper, recalled shopping at the flagship store to find a *metziya—a bargain*, "I grew up in the Loehmann's culture, way back to the old auto salesroom on Nostrand Avenue, with sheets strung for dressing rooms, Back Room dresses for $9.99, and salespeople on the lookout for that special item." Mandel noted that in the early days of Loehmann's, founded in Brooklyn by the late **Frieda Loehmann** in 1921, it served a need for many immigrant Jews, "as if Loehmann's was waiting for these elegant women from European cities who came penniless. It was an opportunity that allowed them to dress in their tastes at prices they could afford."

Loehmann's also had the ability to unleash the beast within all of us. T.V. sitcom "The Nanny" compared a Loehmann's sale to the running of the bulls, and **Fran Drescher's** character warns her charge Gracie, "You are going to see things today that will haunt you for the rest of your shopping life." Years ago, I myself was so immersed in the hunt for a dress I didn't notice my son had left his stroller. In the same breath I alerted the saleswoman my kid was gone, I also instructed her not to put the dresses I had chosen back on the rack. I shouldn't have been thinking about bargain hunting while searching for my son, later found giggling under a rack of shirts—but such was the power of Loehmann's.

When Loehmann's announced in 2013 that it was closing, customers paid their last respects. **Barbara Schwartz** visited her New Hyde Park location to say goodbye to a favorite fitting room attendant, Doris. "She stood on her feet for probably close to 50 years. She organized, hung up, and carefully loved all of her merchandise. Doris spent her life in the confines of an open dressing room taking pure delight when she saw you looking great in a garment. I could sense her smile of satisfaction. Then, I would ask her opinion. She knew just when to encourage the purchase and why." Schwartz also remarked, "There are stores over the years that imitate Loehmann's, but there will never be another one. That will bring me to tears. I am both naked and crying."

The store played a role in shaping our female identity. It was in the Loehmann's fitting room that I caught a glimpse of what I'd look like when I was post-menopausal, while I tried not to stare at women with spider veins trying on cocktail dresses. And every time we went to Loehmann's, my mother joked that the seats outside the fitting room were made for Jewish husbands. As a child, I didn't dream of marrying a prince; I wanted to marry the kind of guy who'd sit on the bench outside a Loehmann's fitting room. This image encompassed all one would want from a life partner—patience, honesty, and the mutual appreciation for a good deal.

It will take time before I'm able to remove my gold Loehmann's Insider Club card from my wallet. And where will we get our dresses for my daughter's bat mitzvah? I'm mournful for all the years of shopping that have been taken from us. I don't think we'll have the same experience nestled up on the couch perusing Gilt and Zappos websites. Like Jewish delis, and the seltzer man, Loehmann's is another part of American Jewish culture that will now live only in stories. Younger women will feel about these tales of Loehmann's shopping experiences the way I felt when I heard my older relatives retelling jokes from Borscht Belt comedians. Even as a child, I knew I'd never really get them.

ALISON LOWENSTEIN

You glimpsed various female identities in those communal dressing rooms.

LOEHMANN'S PHOTO: FLICKR

THINK TANK

On Sex and Silence

I sometimes find talking about sex uncomfortable. There's so much at stake—power, identity, transcendence, and raw humanity. I wasn't raised gabbing like Barbara Streisand's Roz Focker, the sex therapist with an uncontainable comfort with sex. So how did I wind up talking about sex professionally? When I came to feel like the only thing more uncomfortable than talking about sex was *not* talking about it.

In my 20s, I started to see our not-talking-about-sex problem: the mismatch between Americans' comfort consuming women's sexuality and our silencing of women's communication about sex. Sexy billboards freeze-frame a moment without words, but we're free to look a model up and down, knowing her without knowing her. Real teenagers make grown-up decisions about sex every day, but as eager as we are to second-guess their sexual behavior or clothing, we don't want to hear why they make the choices they do. And if they speak up about their lived experience, why are we prepared to shame them for acknowledging what everyone already knows that teenagers do? Shame makes it extremely hard to learn the healthy communication that's needed for respectful, enjoyable sexual encounters, whether at age 16 or 60.

Once I started noticing the silence, I couldn't leave it alone. I knew I shouldn't leave it alone. I began "Subjectified: Nine Women Talk About Sex," a video project that lets women speak for themselves, an oral history of interviews with diverse young women around the U.S. When I started showing "Subjectified" at colleges across the country, I saw that people of all genders wanted urgently to share their own stories. I heard from men who had always wanted to understand their sexual partners but had never been able to elicit the kind of honesty that I'd gotten in my one-time conversations about orgasm, painful sex, violence, love, first times, sex drive, body image, and identity. Because when you really talk about sex, you don't just talk about sex. I started a blog called "Do Tell," where people share their own personal sexual histories anonymously. Most of the 500 stories come from women, many from young people, and many from survivors of sexual violence or abuse—people who have not had the chance or the safety to be open or honest in person.

It's especially hard to be a supportive friend when you've never talked about those body parts before, or those physical acts, or even the fact that both consensual sex and sexual violence are part of people's personal histories. We cultivate stigma when we avoid the topic of sex.

Without words, we're feral children, limited in what we can understand, communicate, or resist. Not being able to talk about women's experiences reinforces the idea that our first-person perspectives don't matter, that sexuality flows through us and without us, for someone else's sake, defining our worth and our identities without our control. (For example, Lilith's Winter 2003/2004 article on oral sex at bar and bat mitzvah parties). Silence brings with it shame, and the cost of shame is enormous and often invisible.

One entity that is often willing to engage with American youth about sex is religion, frequently in the form of speaking out against premarital sex or expressions of women's or queer sexuality. In my own Jewish education, I don't recall any advice about sex. What little influence came from a tacit condoning of the (straight) hookup scene in youth groups, considered—half in jest—as a contribution to Jewish matchmaking. If the social glue of sexuality forged romantic bonds among young Jews, it was the least the chaperones could to do look the other way. But "no comment" on sexuality is not actually a lack of comment. Persistent reinforcement that a topic is off-limits, that's plenty of message. I've spoken to progressive Jewish educators who feel that sexuality is beyond the scope of a religious education, that it's something they assume kids are getting at home or at day school. Sexuality, an intrinsic component of development, is not often broached in Jewish education.

"No message" about sex doesn't arrive in a vacuum. My peers outside the Jewish community were hearing plenty of sin talk and filtering it back to me. I was alarmed when a non-Jewish boyfriend in high school admitted that he prayed for forgiveness for our physical intimacy, implicating me in what he perceived as bad behavior. I resented this projection and preferred my abundance of Jewish guilt to be directed at things that I saw as having real

Rabbi Susan Silverman, asked if she would rather her comedian sister Sarah Silverman were a little milder: "I'd rather hear justice and good-heartedness wrapped in vulgar humor than egotism and closed-mindedness wrapped in Torah."
on *ynetnews.com*, March 9, 2014.

SUBJECTIFIED ART: "VANESSA" ©2009, MELISSA TAPPER GOLDMAN

moral import (i.e. not my choices about sexual behavior). Beyond religion, we are all subject to attitudes reflected in pop culture. The persistent negation of young people's agency and ability to consent—to say yes or no—this thicket of confusing messages fills in the space.

In general, Jewish youth groups and synagogues are not jumping at the opportunity to fill this void in students' moral education. There are individual communities taking the opportunity to teach young people about sexuality across the observance spectrum, though this is not a standard practice even in a progressive setting. Sexuality educator and researcher Mimi Arbeit started a rare sex-ed program for her young adult peers at Moishe Kavod House in the Boston area, beginning with the sex-positive Our Whole Lives sexuality curriculum developed by Unitarian and United Church of Christ congregations. If this seems groundbreaking, we have perhaps regressed since Reform congregations began offering sex-ed courses to confirmation students in 1965.

While secular sex education focuses obsessively on the negative consequences of sex, we aren't comfortable enough with young people's sexuality to send direct messages about what they *should* want from their sexual expression, even if that's in the future or on their own. But who can deny that this is an important component of a person's burgeoning sense of self, of ethics in interpersonal relationships, of growth? Jewish organizations tasked with spiritual education may think they are staying neutral, neither condemning nor affirming a student's sexuality, but the student still lives in a society that enforces rigid gender roles and heteronormative attitudes through shaming and bullying. These omissions marginalize queer youth, even in liberal Jewish settings. And there is no neutral silence; our texts, which we teach our young people to cherish, are often used to justify cruelties and erasures.

Sexuality is at the cusp of what progressive Judaism hasn't figured out about its relationship to rules. We stay silent to bide time, not having developed a coherent message. But our young people don't hear "put that into a modern context" or "read the tradition more deeply," because we're not making those suggestions out loud. They hear silence, and it becomes their heritage, too.

MELISSA TAPPER GOLDMAN

THEATER

In this new folk opera, with its bawdy and edgy alternative story of Creation, you'll meet Adam's first wife. Lilith refuses to lie beneath Adam and flees to the Red Sea, creating, then killing, 100 demon babies a day, until the three angels sent by God negotiate a deal with her. "Lilith the Night Demon in One Lewd Act" premiers in May from the Berkeley-based musical group Veretski Pass. Cookie Segelstein, founder, director and violinist of Veretski Pass, says, "This piece goes from raucous burlesque to sad and serious, more about the function of superstitions against the tragedy of infant mortality."

The medieval Lilith story (at *liliththenightdemon.com*) reminds us how myths and legends keep females in line. A not-so-hidden subtext: speaking out for equality, and for yourself, may be steps on the path to demonization. This Lilith becomes the embodiment of the bad things projected onto women: frigid, yet she seduces boys and men; sterile, yet she has 100 demon children every day. You get it.

LILITH THE NIGHT DEMON ART: PHIL BLANK

IN THE DESERT

fiction by SARAH SELTZER

BY THE TIME ILANA arrived in the Berns' lobby for their Passover seder, she had at least three blisters and counting. The bouquet of daffodils she'd picked up looked as thirsty as she felt; she failed to plump the droopy leaves with her fingers. Another night of remembering the Jews' escape from slavery, another Passover at her boyfriend's apartment, her third in a row doing it the Berns' way.

Each step towards the elevator bank caused a wince. Why had she chosen today to break in her flats? She sat down on the bench beside the elevator and slipped out of the shoes for a blissful moment, a period she used to cautiously press her fingers against the raised circles of fluid that had appeared so quickly. But then she hastily got up, lest she seem too idle, a New York *faux pas*. Mike and his friends always told stories about "stooping it," whiling away hours on the steps of brownstones with sodas and cigarettes in their halcyon youth. But all Ilana saw now was the way they jogged up the subway steps and stepped out of elevators with phones open, scheduling each other in for lunches and dinners—and for spiritual matters, too, like seders, as if holy days were just holidays, diverting items to tick off on the social calendar.

Even her non-Jewish colleagues had bordered on aggression today as they anticipated seders. They were planning on drinking all four glasses of wine, eating matzah piled with pungent horseradish, they warned. *Manischewitz hangovers, am I right?*

Ilana felt her phone buzz through her purse. She guessed the message came from Mike, tardiness its contents, encouraging her to *bond* once more with his family.

Routine, but with stakes: last night they'd had, at his initiation, the DTR talk. Define the relationship. She needed to make up her mind soon, in his words, about "what path she was on." Was she going to stay in town, buckle down on the music thing? She should consider, he said, whether her plans would make room for her to stand with him under the *chuppah*. Was his family aware of this ultimatum? She hadn't dared ask.

At last year's seder, such choices didn't loom. But that had been before Mike lost a classmate to an unspeakable tragedy, before he decided that living life to the fullest meant "get-

ting serious," programming a trajectory into his metaphorical iPhone instead.

So now Ilana was like the Jews in the desert. Free, yes, but wandering, thirsty, blistered. Worse, she had no clue where the promised land lay, if it existed. Mike knew she could return to Iowa, take up where she'd left off. She had a spot waiting for her teaching music at her old Hebrew school; the university's orchestra would surely find room for the daughter of her parents, the humble professors.

DORIS BERNS GREETED HER with a hearty kiss on the cheek and the usual once over, and whisked the daffodils off to get "perked up." Pour some water on me, Doris.
"Mike's late, poor baby," Doris said. Of course he'd contacted mommy. No need to check her own phone.

Ilana hobbled into the living room. Mike's uncle and a partner of Doris's suspended their debate about health care to greet her.

"Great to see you. We were arguing about whether the individual mandate and Obama's..." she stopped listening, kept nodding. The chopped liver on the coffee table looked like dog food, but it was the Jewish *foie gras*, Mike swore, usually before he shoveled down an overwhelming pile of it.

Politics and chopped liver were always on the menu at the Berns apartment. If something controversial hadn't been brought up by the main course, Mike's father Ed would say, "so what do we think of the Senate's take on" a given foreign war, a verbal melee would ensue and they'd love it. At the end of the meal when they said "next year in Jerusalem" they didn't mean it, because their Jerusalem was here, on West End Avenue. And they wanted Ilana's to be, too.

At her own family seders, no appetizers were served.

"What do you think?" Ed asked Ilana, and she gulped. "Do you think Obama's ruined things with his plan?"

"Oh," said Ilana.. "Well there have been so many times Mike and me"—shit, shouldn't it be Mike and I?–"kept thinking Obama had messed up, but then he'd end up being savvy, pulling out a victory." She cleared her throat, hoping she'd acquitted herself. The truth was, with Mike, she *could* talk about healthcare: single payer, public option, individual mandate, but the Berns living room felt like a tribunal, as she'd told a colleague at happy hour last night, the happy hour she *had* to go to because it was rude not to.

New York was a series of oral examinations.

At her parents' house they read the Haggadah, intoned the prayers, quoted the diary of Anne Frank. Ilana's heart twisted. She saw her mother's wrinkled face and the housedresses she still wore when she cooked, her mother the prestigious professor making brisket in a *schmatte*. She imagined the Berns' seders piling up behind her, and her mother growing further away, closer to the dark end of the tunnel of years.

"That's what I've been saying," said Doris, arriving in the doorway with a tray of water glasses.

"Oh—I should have been helping!" Ilana jumped up; pain surged through her heel.

Mike always declared that the key to Doris's heart was kitchen duty.

"Are you limping?" asked Doris, as Ilana stoically distributed water.

"Blisters," said Ilana.

"Oy," said Doris. "But you wear such sensible shoes, never clomping around in stilettos. That's why we love you, dear. Me, I wear old lady orthotics. They're expensive, they scream 'middle age' but *do they last*. Oh, I remember our heels—back in the 70s, sturdy platforms, not so wobbly." She reminisced with obvious longing.

Doris' stout but compact figure was impeccably clad in one of her trademark silk blouses tucked into sharp trousers. "That's why we love you;" how easily Doris applied the phrase. Was it possible? Ilana could barely squeak out "I love you" to Mike, whom she'd followed out here, who used the "l-word" routinely. Maybe Doris, Mike and their family were programmed to love with ease. Maybe it was fake.

Ilana's earlier image of her mother came back to her, scolded her: "They're so nice to you. How can we repay them?" She must be gracious and cease the internal kvetch session.

"In New York, everyone looks at your shoes before they look at your face," she confided in Doris.

Doris clucked. "When they do look, they'll see a gorgeous *punim* without makeup smeared all over it."

The Yiddish intoxicated her, Ilana had to admit, as did Doris's premature motherly pride, but she wondered if Doris would say this to any nice Jewish girl her son brought home, or sent to his home without him. Sometimes when she hadn't seen her in a while, Ilana couldn't even picture Doris in her mind—she just imagined what-was-her-name, that beautifully plump actress perennially cast as the New York Jewish mother. If Doris said "punim" one more time, she'd be too much of a cliché to be true.

Mike had arrived unheard; he slipped into the chair beside Ilana's as they sat down at the table, muttering an apology. "Ilana, I'm sorry," he kissed her just above her ear and whispered. "They're working overtime to woo you I see."

They blessed the candles and the wine. Doris grew misty-eyed and spoke about absent family members, the grandparents and Mike's sister Erica studying in Florence.

"And one person in particular, Mike's beloved classmate Rina, we lost in such a tragic accident this year."

Silence descended on the table—a rarity.

Ilana glanced at her partner's suddenly-still face. Mike felt he had to sprint to the Promised Land; he was scared of being mowed down before he got there. She squeezed his hand. *Poor baby*, Doris had said.

Doris's voice took on a lilt; she added "and of course, dear Ilana's family. May we celebrate Pesach together someday."

Mindful of Mike and her mom's imaginary exhortation, Ilana said, "That sounds lovely!" She pictured her straight-backed parents beaming as Ilana and her sister sounded out the Haggadah's Hebrew. Back home, the kids hid the last piece of matzah and made it into a contest for the adults instead of vice versa as they did here. Her parents set out an empty chair for those they had lost, a wordless tribute.

Ilana closed her eyes and thought about the seder's four questions, really one: why was this night different from all others? She leaned on Mike. They were in the desert.

They listed ritual foods: Matzah, the bread of affliction. "It afflicts my digestive system," shared Doris. Ilana rolled her eyes. Mike elbowed her.

Ilana yawned. Early that morning, she had woken to a bird's noisy reveille outside their bedroom, the remnants of happy hour—or the remnants of her talk with Mike—pushing at her skull. She'd thought, *I should go for a run*, but instead curled up into a giant fist, clenched for some unknown fight.

In his sleep this year, Mike had whimpered and yelped, he had fretted "where are you?" In the mornings, he never remembered his dreams.

Now Mike gesticulated and Good Lord, spittle was forming in the corner of his mouth. "That's why I'm thinking that the Zionist project is misguided," Mike said.

"You're thinking that?" asked Ilana, wide-eyed, prompting laughter. Mike turned the color of the beet-dyed horseradish on the table.

She slid her blistered feet back into her shoes, again, and recalled an evening when she was a small girl. She had said, "Oh, so and so *from my class is stupid*." And her mother, in that floral-print house dress she put on after a day training medical students, had sat her down: *Sweetie. We respect people, even when we don't like their actions*. Ilana saw the peas on her fork, the touch of her mother's hand, her own shame. Mike would have said, *your mom's wrong. Some people are stupid.* She would have laughed.

"What if Exodus *reinforces* Zionism, though?" asked Ed, professorially. "A parable about how the Jews aren't safe on strange land, maybe?"

"It's an allegory, not an imperialist directive," said Mike.

"Okay, back to the Haggadah!" said Doris, casting a wary look at Ilana. She was worried her son would push Ilana away. Well, she should be. But could it be that Doris had once suffered misgivings before she became a Berns? Perhaps she was just remembering.

Later in the kitchen with the matzah balls, Doris asked how Mike "seemed." Ilana said "better" as if the two women had previously agreed he was ailing. Ilana mentioned neither his dreams nor his ultimatum.

They bore soup bowls into the dining room. Doris asked "And you, Ilana?" over Mike's head, wondered how Ilana's cello auditions were coming—which smarted because they weren't at all.

"She's so talented," said Mike, as they slid back into their chairs. "I wanted her to bring the cello to the seder, but she wouldn't."

Ilana pinched him.

Then it came, from one of the cousins clustered around the parsley: "So when are you going to pop the question already?"

A few long milliseconds of collective held breath ended when Mike, ever ready, snorted, "When you get a girlfriend—oh, that would be never."

Ilana forced a chuckle and gulped more wine. She had been here for three years and the Berns clan possessed zero ability to keep their mouths shut. It must be genetic.

"Hush," said Doris. "Poor Ilana!" They moved on to singing "Dayenu," Ilana's favorite part, the only part when her own family loosened. She sang with gusto, even a grin.

She surprised herself by giggling and declaring, "Doris, you've *outdone* yourself with the brisket," as they reached the main course. Mike lit up at her words. His desires were so uncomplicated on the surface—act happy to eat Doris' food. Join in.

"I spent too much time sampling it during the cooking," said Doris. "My diet starts tomorrow, I always say."

Ilana laughed freely. Doris' plumpness in the midst of reedy female lawyers: that, at least, reminded her of home.

She had downed two full glasses of Manischewitz, and felt soggy, not unpleasantly so. The pain from her feet, and her irritation were both buried beneath brisket and bitter herbs. Maybe it would be fine to come to seder here every year, walking click-clack down West End Avenue, blisters be damned. To schedule things in: happy hours, lunches, ritual observances, the future.

Maybe she could let the words "love you" trip past her lips the way Mike and Doris did (but not her family, who saved those words), and rant about the election and like Doris, produce a passel of children who argued for sport.

Politics and chopped liver were always on the menu at the Berns apartment. Something controversial had to be introduced by the main course.

New York was a series of oral examinations.

She reached around Mike's shoulder, glass in hand, and gave him a kiss. "Let's help your mom clear up," she said. He looked at her as if she'd parted the Red Sea all by herself.

After dessert thick with matzah meal flour, Ilana shook herself awake to finish the Haggadah. She declined the third cup of wine and said to Doris, her voice loose, "I think we'd better consider mine symbolically refilled."

"I think Ilana's getting into the Berns seder swing," said Doris.

"We've converted her. From Judaism to Bernsianism," said Ed. "No pressure."

The truth of it—their own religion—struck Ilana. The one time Mike visited her he'd been bewildered: "Do your parents ever, you know, talk about politics or their feelings? You sure they're Jewish?" and she'd retorted "Christ, Mike, Upper West Siders aren't the only Jews." They'd flown back in silence.

Ilana rifled through her bag to check her phone. The message she assumed came from Mike had been from her mom, like a parody of a parent trying to text: "Happy holiday dear Ilana. Be good. We miss you. From, Mom." The word "love" was absent, the sentiment present in abundance.

The final songs had layers of repetition. Even at home, Ilana found this warbling wearying. The cousins banged their spoons. Someone yodeled. Ilana tapped her foot until she felt a sharp squeeze as her biggest blister popped. It was raw where the skin had been, where the fluid had gushed out. Suddenly she wanted to cry. She was going to cry.

She felt this was her last Berns seder. Her last seder in New York.

So as everyone shouted "Next year in Jerusalem," she dashed from the table, telling Mike her foot was bleeding, and ran through his childhood room to the bathroom. She sat on the toilet lid, peeled off her shoe and saw the mess—torn skin, a smear of blood. She dabbed at it with a paper towel and sobbed.

A gentle tap came on the door. Ilana swallowed, wiped her eyes and said, "Come in."

Doris stood in the entrance to the bathroom with a box of cotton and a familiar-looking bottle of hydrogen peroxide and she said, "Your feet are all cut up. You should have said."

Ilana sniffed. If Doris had been played by that actress, Ilana would have said, "I am lost," and Doris would have said, "you're a long way from home, *bubbeleh*" and made a remark about the seder, or the Exodus, or her own life, that told Ilana where the path lay to the Promised Land.

But Doris seemed tired, exhausted even, and she said nothing of the sort. She simply propped Ilana's foot over the bathtub and curtly—but not unkindly—said, "this will sting." ■

Sarah Seltzer is a fiction writer and journalist in New York City. She tweets at @sarahmseltzer.

WRITTEN ON MATZOH

a slave breathing
limestone dust,
carries a heavy stone for a backpack.

Waiting to set it down for generations,
waiting to rest it by the foot of a quilted bed.
During the last year of suffering

fists let go and blossom.
We have no time to think,
only time to get through,

searching for straw to make bricks,
under the refrigerator, in the cabinets,
in the cracks of the car seat.

The only whip ticking at the hour,
a slight change on the face.
Ancestors walking forty years in the desert
compressed to one week each year.

Matzoh falls from heaven. We collect the broken
manna glistening above the sand like frost.

Gathering the sparks falling from it with brooms.
On the table it loses its shimmer,
sheets of stiff parchment,

the typewriter keys are white teeth
eating up our story.

SARAH ANTINE

Coming into Feminist Toddlerhood

A Little Girl's First Haircut

by ALANNA E. COOPER

Miriam's honey-brown hair reached the small of her back and was magnificent in its soft unevenness, curling at the ends like a field of wildflowers.

That is, until she turned three.

Now it neatly skirts her shoulders; my little girl appears older, more self-assured. We cut her hair for the first time at her *upsherin*. Perched on a stool, her small hands folded in her lap, eyes wide, she smiled like a little Mona Lisa as our family and guests took turns ceremonially snipping strands of her long curls.

This was not the first time my husband and I held an upsherin in our home. Miriam has two older sisters whose hair was also cut for the first time, among family and friends, when they were three. I tried to write an essay to describe the event we held for our eldest, and tried again after the second. Both times I was unable. I was too self-conscious. An upsherin, after all, is a ceremony for a boy. Not a girl.

Among the very few upsherins I've attended was the one my friend Shulie held for her son. She gave birth to Rafi around the same time that my eldest daughter, Rebecca, was born. By the time he was two, his soft curly hair, like my Rebecca's, was flopping into his eyes. Shulie would pin it up or put in a ponytail, as though he were a girl. With a hint of shame in her voice, she confessed that strangers almost always referred to Rafi as "she."

Unlike Shulie, who is an Orthodox Israeli, most of my friends have given their children their first haircuts perfunctorily; a few snips and it's over. I'm saddled with the baggage of being a cultural anthropologist, though, and I can't get away from the symbolism with which the event's traditionally laden.

I couldn't help but see Rebecca's untamed hair as a vestige of our earliest, most primordial connection: she came out of my body, into the world, with that hair! My difficulty cutting it manifested the most fundamental dilemma that mothers face: the desire to watch our children grow into functioning, confident, capable individuals…and our longing for them to stay close, connected.

While Rebecca's hair grew long and unruly, I often joked about holding an upsherin for her, though I knew it didn't make traditional sense. The ritual is not only about "shearing" (a word with the same etymological root as the Yiddish "upsherin"), but is simultaneously linked to creating *peyot*—sidelocks. At a traditional upsherin, the three-year-old boy also dons a *kippah* and a fringed ritual undergarment (*tzitzit*) for the first time.

Anyone who has witnessed an upsherin knows that the transformation is breathtaking. Like a caterpillar suddenly emerging from its cocoon as a butterfly, in an instant the child morphs from genderless baby into religious Jewish boy. I could not possibly conjure up a parallel ritual for my daughter!

Still, Abraham held an event to mark the weaning of his son Isaac. Where was Sarah during this party? I wondered. And what about me and my daughter? As I moved from being the mother of a breast-feeding baby who wore diapers to being the mother of a child who could now attend to her own bodily functions, I longed for a ritual to usher me through our separation. I also realized that it was not only Shulie whom I envied; it was Rafi, too.

In Israel, the upsherin ritual is generally called *halaka*, from the Arabic word for haircut. Although its origins are murky, anthropologist Yoram Bilu believes that the ritual may have been modeled on the Muslim custom of shaving children's hair at saints' tombs, and that this custom was practiced by Musta'arbim (Jews native to Palestine) as early as the Middle Ages. Anthropologist Harvey

Goldberg suggests that the custom first emerged among North African Jews who cut their sons' hair for the first time at the age of three near the graves of local venerated rabbis. About two centuries ago, it seems, the halaka became intertwined with another ritual that had evolved in a different part of the Jewish world.

As far back as the 12th century, Western European Jews held a "school-initiation ceremony" when boys started their religious study. Historian Ivan Marcus explains that a father would wrap his child in a prayer shawl and take him to the home of the local teacher. Seated on the teacher's lap, the boy would recite a Hebrew alphabet that had been written on a tablet and smeared with honey. The boy would lick off the honey.

"See, little one?" the custom inculcates, "Jewish learning is sweet."

(These rites also included magic incantations meant to banish an evil spirit who interfered with memory. Marcus writes that the conjuries "adjured Potah, the Prince of Forgetfulness, to go far away and not block the boy's heart." In those days, when manuscripts were expensive and rare, nothing was as crucial to scholarship as a keen memory; in our electronic world, of course, we can hardly conceive of this.)

Today, among the ultra-Orthodox—and expanding to other observant circles—these strands are woven together. The child's upsherin is combined with his introduction to Jewish literacy. Indeed, his recitation of the *alef-bet* is the linchpin of the ritual. Through his newfound ability to discern letters, he is welcomed into the vast world of Jewish textual knowledge, linked into the chain of transmission.

When he was a newborn, this same boy was welcomed into the community through his *milah* (ritual circumcision), which left him with an indelible physical mark binding him to Jewish history. Yet he carries no memory of this. By contrast, he is an active, conscious participant at his upsherin. The ritual is meant to imprint upon him, at a key developmental moment, his place in history, his connection to a community past.

I loved this powerful gift that Rafi's parents could give him so easily, since he was male. Yet as a woman, and as a mother of girls, I was also troubled by it. The ritual, as it is widely practiced today, fuses together separate maturational events: the child's transformation out of babyhood is linked to his gendering (he goes into the ritual looking genderless or girl-like, and finishes the ritual as a boy), and his gendering, in turn, is linked to his induction into literacy. If the upsherin sends the message that "growing up" means "becoming a boy" and gaining access to literacy, where does this leave our daughters?

I'm a cultural anthropologist. I can't get away from the loaded symbolism.

Personally, it left me confused. I recoiled from the upsherin's display of male propriety over Jewish textual tradition, a tradition to which girls and women were for so long given little or no access. Still, I was drawn to its richly layered lessons about what it means to belong, to be Jewish, to grow up.

ILLUSTRATION BY HILA PELEG

So I pulled apart the strands, un-fusing the three events, opening them up in a way that made it possible for me to give my daughters upsherins, too. The process was not totally comfortable or smooth, taking me three times to figure out.

Well, now my dear Miriam is three, and I am 45. I have most likely said goodbye for the last time to a fully dependent baby and also to a rich, blessed stage of my own life.

We held Miriam's upsherin on the eve of Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates the receiving of the Torah. How auspicious! My husband Moshe and I invited a few friends—some because they had watched Miriam grow, some because we knew they were kindred spirits who would appreciate what we were trying to do. After the ceremony [below], we had a festive meal, and I felt happy and sad. I said goodbye to my last baby, trusting that Moshe and I have launched her on the road to becoming a rooted and learned Jewish woman.

Lighting the candles with my three girls, I prayed silently:

May Rebecca, Anna Belle and Miriam study our Jewish texts. May they celebrate our holidays and stay close to our People. May they remember who they are and from whence they came.

Amen. ■

Alanna E. Cooper, cultural anthropologist and adult educator, is Director of Jewish Studies at Case Western Reserve University's Siegal Lifelong Learning Program. She became interested in women's haircutting rituals while conducting field research in Central Asia, and has written about them in her book, Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism.

Haircutting Ritual for Your Daughter

Traditional (male) *upsherins* are generally held near boys' third birthdays, but historically they were also held on two other days: on Lag b'Omer, 33 days after Passover, when haircuts and festivities are traditionally permitted, and just before Shavuot, when Jews celebrate receiving the Torah—because the upsherin inducts the newly shorn child into its study.

Besides family and friends, you might consider inviting a learned role model or two for your daughter, making it explicit that this ceremony is about valuing your daughter's (and females') Jewish learning. My husband and I invited men and women (and kids) to our daughter Miriam's upsherin, but you could certainly choose to make your daughter's ritual a purely "women's event" in which she's surrounded by the special girls and women in her life.

We began our event with the haircut, singing "*siman tov u'mazal tov*" as we put Miriam on a high stool and all gathered around. I took the first snip (after a few deep breaths), followed by my husband Moshe, and then our two other daughters, Rebecca and Anna Belle. After that, all the invited guests took snips, tucking Miriam's shorn ringlets into a little keepsake bag (that I still intend to decorate!). I had invited a hairdresser to our upsherin and he neatened up our collective effort (though you may choose not to do this). When the hairdresser was done, I put a flower wreath in Miriam's hair. She looked older, smarter, and beautiful.

We then all migrated over to a table on which I had laid out a (homemade) Hebrew-letter chart covered with wax paper and drizzled with chocolate syrup. You're supposed to drizzle honey over each of the letters, but in the chaos that is our home, we forgot to buy honey. I led Miriam in a call-and-response, and after she repeated each letter, I guided her finger to the right letter and helped her take a lick. (Instead of doing this yourself, you might want to honor a teacher, older child or grandparent with this role.) I found this part of the ritual very moving.

Finally, I presented Miriam with a child's set of candlesticks, explaining to her that she was now old enough to join her sisters and me in lighting them together every *shabbos* and holiday. She proudly held them up for all to see. We ended the ceremony with the four of us females—Rebecca, Anna Belle, Miriam and me—lighting the candles together to usher in Shavuot.

At the festive meal that followed, I spoke about the hopes for Miriam that my husband and I share. (You might want to ask guests to offer your daughter impromptu blessings; we didn't do this.) I also gave a little *drash*, explaining that a child's upsherin is often compared to the first pruning of a tree. I borrowed words from Jeremiah (17:8) for a blessing:

"May you be as a tree that spreads out its roots by the river, whose foliage is luxurious even when the heat comes and that yields fruit even in times of drought." I shared my fervent hope that Miriam draw strength from the "river" of Torah and tradition where she was planted, and that from this place of rootedness, her productivity and creativity would always flourish.

Miriam beamed.

—A.E.C.

FOR MORE ON HAIR, that evergreen subject, check out Lilith's iconic Spring 1995 issue online at *lilith.org/current-issues/page/46*.

The Refusal of Time: Visiting the *Old* Old

Wordless Tea

by LIAT KATZ

She smells like sour milk and she looks like loneliness. I am tasked with meeting her and coming up with a written plan. She is all of 80 pounds sitting on a faded-pink wingback chair and wearing only a tattered top. No underwear, no pants, just a camisole. I hold her 90-year-old wrinkled hand and look at her. The dangling skin from her thighs looks like old white shirts draped on metal hangers.

With both of her hands, she grasps my hand with a surprisingly steady tight grip as if I were all that was keeping her grounded for the moment. I wonder who she once was and what she did in her life. She has no idea who I am, that she is exposing herself, that she has soiled her chair, or that her name is Erma. She can't remember if or when she ate or if she took any medication. Her words don't quite make sense, but, in looking around, I see that her life doesn't quite make sense either.

I walk around this small condominium in Bethesda. A hurricane of dust dances in the light from the window, landing on layers upon layers of her belongings. I find passports with stamps from around the world, and I find dated correspondence. There are utility bills, perfume bottles, and a collection of small pewter animals all mixed together. In one pile, there are blackened lemon peels and coffee grounds lying on gold-framed photographs of various children and adults.

I help her gently climb into a pair of Depends, and we just sit. Our two chairs are an island in the middle of the chaos of what her life has become. I am the Adult Protective Services social worker assigned to assess if she is neglecting herself. Holding hands and sitting is the protocol of the moment. She needs me, and, truth be told, I need this moment, too. There is something about sitting with a person in silence, just sitting, that comforts as much as a warm embrace.

After a few minutes of silence, she asks, "You want some tea, dear?" She has no tea, no kettle, no cups, and no clue.

"Sure," I say. She grins, and her few teeth make her mouth look like an abandoned skyline. We continue to sit, her feet propped up on the box of Depends. To her, we are having tea. To me, it is delicious.

"You want some tea, dear?" She has no tea, no kettle, no cups, no clue.

I know I need to write up a plan for Erma; but how do you describe such a person or such an experience? I start to write, "Client is a 90-year-old single woman who exhibits signs of dementia...." And signs of beauty, and signs of the frailty of existence—of hers, of mine, of all of ours. She exhibits signs of spiritual connection, of survival in being able to ignore all the horrors around her, signs of, of....

In my mind, an accurate description of her condition would be "pleasantly demented," but I am charged with providing a report with a more clinical definition, a report that will determine her future.

I start digging through her piles of belongings, but I find no sign of current family. I ask Erma about photos of various people and she smiles, but she clearly does not know who they are. I check wallets within the piles, and I look at a few letters with no legible contact information. I even check my smartphone for any leads, but, alas, I find nothing. So I know what my task at hand is, but it hurts to do what I have to do. "Social worker called 911 to get client evaluated for dehydration, malnutrition, and competency," I write, after I hang up the phone. If I could, I would take her home and feed her a diet of hearty soup, real tea, and a large dose of my toddlers' hugs.

"Client needs evaluation for placement in a skilled nursing facility." The words move painfully from my fingers onto the computer; my words mean that her beauty and charm will be lost. The beauty of her sweet dementia and hands that reach out to strangers will be translated into paperwork: symptomology and Medicaid eligibility. My words will lead to placement in whatever nursing home I can get her into immediately; her vulnerable body will most likely be at the mercy of the rough hands of nursing assistants who get paid way too little to wipe feces from little old women.

The paramedics take Erma down the stairs, and I go out to my car. I sit for a moment thinking about all the Ermas of my career. I hope I am always about that tea. ■

Liat Katz, a clinical social worker, lives in Rockville, Maryland. She is the author of an unpublished memoir, Creatively Maladjusted: Essays of a Broken Life.

"Go check on Gramma," my father said.

by GAYLE ANN WEINSTEIN

In 1983, my father *sent me to Miami to check on my grandmother, Jean Weinstein, who had just lost her youngest son, my uncle Jerry, and before that her husband of 57 years, my Grampa Sam. I was 32, a widow with a 12-year-old son, living in Buffalo Grove, a suburb of Chicago. "It'll be a vacation," my father said. "On me." The deal was that I'd report back on Gramma's state of mind.*

Gramma Jenny, at 78, lived independently in her "patio home"—an attached, one-story cottage—and she was not all right. In one bedroom I found jars of okra resembling floating caterpillars stacked floor to ceiling; she'd pickled them (in what she called Martha Washington seasoning) and there was enough to last until the Messiah returned with Martha Washington herself. Eggs in Gramma's fridge were black inside, and when we poured cereal, ants crawled out of the bowls.

There were also golf balls. Hundreds of them. Gramma Jenny's house backed onto a golf course and she collected the balls daily, selling them back to golfers at $1 a bag. She kept what she called the "psychedelic" ones—Day-Glo orange, green, pink and yellow—for herself, setting them into bowls and vases all over the house in a patio-home Florida version of haut décor.

I had a "last chance" feeling about this trip, so I brought my tape recorder. I had always relished Gramma Jenny's bobe mayses, and also her Yiddish accent. Late one night I plugged a light bulb into the baseboard next to the dining room table, and, whoosh, she was off and running. She talked through five 30-minute tapes. Here, Gramma Jenny tells me about her mother, Bluma Meyer Symon, my paternal great-grandmother. Some of the facts seem off, but what do I know? It's her story.

My mother's name was Bluma. She was nice-looking and dark, and she was a businesswoman like a fire. Like a fire she was. She was a butcher. Everybody said she should have been a boy. The other butchers called her *curova*, the queen. She could cut a piece of meat like nobody else. We lived in Lodz, Poland, and that time there were 20 butcher shops in the middle of the street: 10 Gentile and 10 Jewish. In summer, all the kosher butchers had the same trouble: there was no icebox and nowhere to keep the meat cold. The Jewish butchers used only the top of the cow and lamb; the bottoms were not kosher. My mother would sometimes cut a cow and a lamb in one day. In summer, bugs were eating the meat. My sister and I used to beat off the white bugs with a rag.

The Gentiles came to the Jewish butchers to buy those bottoms, because some knew how to take out the veins from the meat, and they used all kinds of meat for sausages. They killed pigs, but Jewish people killed only cows and lambs. Chickens were separate. Everyone buys a chicken for *shabbos*; they go to the rabbi and he kills it. There is no chicken store. Every Friday and Monday, all the farmers came to the city market. They sell butter, eggs, cheese, chicken, turkey, goose, duck. You buy what you want, and go to the *shochet* who makes it kosher.

Anyway, there was one very rich farmer who lives like a king. He has a lot of people working for him, and he doesn't do nothing. He goes all over Europe, all over the world, and he makes a living from the poor farmers who work for him. He kept a thousand cows. That's a rich man. He, too, had no icebox, and nowhere to keep the meat, but on his farm he had a lake, and in winter he would chop out blocks of ice and keep vegetables and meat and everything with ice in a great big room in his basement.

Anyway, this rich man comes to the town in summer when the meat is cheaper. He would buy as much as you got and put it in his basement. He made parties, so they need a lot, and also he gives meat to the farmers who work for him. He has no worries. So this rich farmer comes to my mother's shop first, and he looks over everything and he asks how much she wants for it all around. Now that time my mother was engaged to the son of another butcher. The farmer says nothing to my mother, and he goes across to my mother's boyfriend's mother to see how much she wants. Then the rich farmer tells *her* he's going to see the curova. My mother was in the store making packages for the soldiers. That farmer was so in love with my mother he bought all the meat for 40 rubles! He had four horses and a coach and his helpers carried out all the meat.

> My grandmother Feigeh said, "I told you not to get married to an old maid. She works hard and cuts the cows and cuts the meat, she will never have any children."

Well, the boyfriend's mother came out of her shop and she says to my mother,

"You're not going to get married to my son."

My mother says to her, "I was inside with the meat. I didn't know he went in by you."

"No," she said, "you were going forth and back, and that's why he came in to your shop."

So when the boy came home from the army, the mother made the boy break the engagement. She told him he couldn't marry anyone who took away her customers. That was the fifth boy she was engaged to marry.

But, anyway, my mother was very picky. If someone said a fella had a fight, she broke the engagement. If you would come home and say a fella was no good, she broke the engagement. But this time, the boy's mother broke the engagement and my mother was very broken up. Meantime, there were 10 children in her family and you've got to go first and then next. You can have a boyfriend, but you cannot marry. My mother was oldest, already 35 years old, and in Europe that's an old maid, like she would be 100. Meantime, the others had boyfriends and girlfriends. All right. So my grandmother's brother felt sorry for the children, and he wanted to find for my mother a husband.

So what happened? My grandmother's brother lived in another little town and he lived next door to Faigeh, whose son was in the army. He told her, "I've got a girl for you. A girl up-to-date. She can run a butcher shop like nobody in the world can do. She can cut a piece of meat like nobody in the world can do. I would like you should see this girl, and you would have for your boy a very fine girl, a highly educated rabbi's daughter."

My grandfather was a very religious man, a high man in history—Gershon Meyer. He was a big rabbi, but he didn't get paid. He only studied Torah all day and night.

So my grandmother's brother wrote in a letter to his sister that he is coming with Sudick, a boy who just came home from the army. My father was five-and-a-half years a soldier. You only have to be three years, but when you're a genius they keep you five. And he also was a butcher,

Capturing the Elderly Visiting Each Other

"Oma & Bella" is the indie film Alexa Karolinski (in bottom photo, below) made about her grandmother and her grandmother's friend—two Holocaust survivors in their 80s—who live together in Berlin. They cook, talk about food, entertain friends and family, play cards and remember their parents, their losses and their coming to life again after the Holocaust, when they felt a need to get dressed up and party to make up for a youth they never experienced. Bella (left, in the images below) moved in with Regina (the Oma, or grandma, of the filmmaker) to help her recover from surgery, and just stayed. The pair are the envy of their elderly friends for having found this comfy solution to loneliness. (75 minutes, in German with English subtitles. *omabella.com)*

nice-looking and strong. Tall and big and strong. If my mother got married, then the others could get married, too. So they made the engagement and got married.

My mother had $300 from my grandparents. The parents got to have money for a girl to get married. Anyway, my parents bought in Warsaw a black leather couch and beautiful chifferobe to put clothes in. In the middle my mother kept her clothes, and in another part, bed linens. They had beautiful tables and a washstand, because you had to bring water in from outside. And they bought a beautiful chandelier for the living room. They had a beautiful dining table with six chairs. It was a beautiful house, a rich house because my mother was very rich. She had a maid even for cooking, because she worked all day in the butcher shop. She worked all her life from five years old.

My father was a helluva husband. He liked to go to the saloon and drink. My mother didn't say nothing. She was 35, and in Europe 35 was very old. Nobody looks for that. There, when you were 14, 15 years old, you get married. My grandmother Zelda was 14 years, and my grandfather Gershon was 15 when they got married. My grandmother had so many children that 10 lived. When you asked her how many children she had, she said she don't remember. That time there was no way to stop it, you know?

So, all right, it was already a year and three months that my mother and father were married. My father's mother came to see my father and she says, "She's not pregnant?"

"No, he says, "she works every day. She isn't pregnant."

My grandmother Feigeh said, "I told you not to get married to an old maid. She works hard and cuts the cows and cuts the meat, she will never have any children."

There, the mother-in-law was the boss. My father looked up to his mother, and he told my mother he wants a divorce, because she is an old maid and she won't be able to have children, and he wants children.

So what happened? My grandpa Gershon says, "Look, Sudick, let's go to

see the highest rabbi in a different town and take with your mother."

They go to the highest rabbi in Lodz. My grandfather goes in, and he says he has a problem with his daughter and he tells that other rabbi the whole story: His daughter was engaged five times, and they are just a year and three months married, and he wants already a child, and the mother is making trouble, telling him to get a divorce, because, she says, my mother is an old maid and will never have children. My grandfather tells the rabbi that my father takes his mother's part.

There, a divorce is a big thing. In the Jewish tradition, if you want a divorce, you have to live with your husband or wife 10 years. Then, if you don't have children, you come to the rabbi, and you don't have to say nothing, and he gives you the papers for a divorce.

So the rabbi says to my father, "How long are you married?"

My father says, "One year and three months."

The rabbi says, "In one year and three months you want to have a child? Not everybody can have a child just when they get married. Sometimes it takes time."

So my father says, "My mother says my wife is 35 and an old maid when I married her, and I want a divorce."

The rabbi says, "Well, you can't get it. You wait 10 years and then I'll give you a divorce."

There, you are afraid of a rabbi! If he talks, you got to listen to him.

The rabbi said, "Your mother is a witch. Whoever mixes in a marriage cannot have a good life."

My grandmother Zelda was listening at the door. When she heard that, she was crying. She didn't expect the rabbi to talk about her like that.

So, the rabbi gave my mother all kind herbs from a tree, and he told her to make a tea from that and drink it. He told her to go to the purifying bath, the mikveh. She came home, and she drank that tea before she went to sleep, and she got pregnant with Joe. She was pregnant, and it was a boy. My father was in heaven. A

Bluma

boy is head of the house. My brother Joe was the first child and a grandson, and my grandparents couldn't do enough for him.

Meantime, my mother could have no milk at all because she was working so hard. A woman had a baby and she came and nursed my brother. My brother stayed mostly by my grandparents. Everybody stood for that boy. He was a spoiled brat, you know, because everybody loved him. They wouldn't let you touch him. He was beautiful-looking with blond hair, and he had a good head on his shoulders. He knew Hebrew already before he went to school.

All right. Then my mother had another boy. Then she had me. Then she had a boy, and then she had my little sister, and that's all. So my mother had five children: Joe, Mirte, me (Shayndl), Zingl, and my youngest sister, Pesche (Pearl).

So what happened? My father's brother was a rich man, and he sends money every month from America. He was from Macon, Georgia. There, he had a tailor shop. He was disappointed in Europe and never married, so when my mother had five children, he wrote a letter and told my mother to send a boy he could adopt and put all his money on my brother's name. In America, he said, if you haven't got somewhere for the money to go, they take it.

Of course, my mother didn't want to send away a child, but she had nothing to say; my father was the one who said what to do. So my mother wrote a letter to my uncle, to please let her have her first child's bar mitzvah. After that, she said, she would let him go. She was crying and broken up, but it didn't help. She had to do what my father said.

So, on Saturday is the bar mitzvah. My brother goes to shul, and they call him up to read the Torah, and they go home and make the party. On Sunday, my uncle sends a man for my brother, because my mother said she wasn't going to send the boy by himself to America. My mother thought there is no culture and no religious people in America, and she didn't like that, but she couldn't say nothing. So the man took my brother Joe to the train, and took him away to America. My mother was crying all the years. She never saw my brother again. He sent for her, but they wouldn't let her come, because by then she was older and her eyes were no good.

Years went by, and when my brother graduated high school, my uncle was making a big party, and he wrote to my father that he should come. My father went to America and never came back. He left my mother with four children, and he got married there!

But my mother wasn't sorry. She was a rich woman and she didn't miss him at all. She told us, "If a man is not a provider, you cannot love him. No matter how much you love him, the love goes out." My mother loved us, and she hired a maid who took care on us, because my mother was always in the butcher shop.

It turned out that my "last chance" feeling was right. Shortly after I returned from Florida, Gramma Jenny became very ill, and my father brought her to Chicago where she lived out her final days at the Lieberman Nursing Home in Skokie. I visited her weekly for a whole year, but she no longer knew who I was and she no longer told stories. ■

Gayle Ann Weinstein holds a Creative Writing Certificate from Graham School, University of Chicago. Another story from the Shayndl memoir, "Meet Me On The Corner," is at persimmontree.org. Other work at gayleannweinstein.net. She reminds us to record our elders.

The Gingham Dresses

by ALISHA KAPLAN

In my grandparents' house, a 1950s rambler in Toronto's Downsview neighborhood, nearly every surface was decorated with photos: children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren; bar and bat mitzvahs, graduations, weddings. One black-and-white photo, though, stood starkly apart: 10 young women, in two rows like a class picture, all wearing the same gingham dresses. I was always captivated by the photo, and inspected it whenever I came to visit. I knew that my grandmother, Judith, was the girl at the top right. In fact, I knew all their names because my grandma wrote them in the margins. I was both fascinated and troubled by Clara, the woman in the middle, the only one wearing a white blouse.

The photograph was taken on May 5, 1945, after Judith and nine women with whom she'd survived Auschwitz were liberated by American soldiers and brought to live in former Nazi headquarters in Schwerin, Germany. The soldiers visited almost daily, bringing food from their own rations. The "girls," as my grandma called them, slowly gained weight and their hair began to grow back. One of the soldiers, who was Jewish, took extra care of Judith. "He wanted to adopt me," she liked to say.

One day the soldier asked Judith if he could get her anything special.

"Yes," she said shyly. "I would love a sewing machine and a little fabric."

Grandma would explain to me, "You see, Alisha, we only had shmatas to wear."

She sewed them from blue-and-white checkered sheets found in an abandoned Nazi barracks.

This photo was always displayed in her living room.

The soldier found an old sewing machine and blue-and-white checkered bed sheets from an abandoned SS barracks. Before the war, Grandma had supported her family by working as a seamstress; now she threw herself into the task of making dresses.

"You see the puffed-up sleeves, *mamaleh*? How the collars come down into those lovely points?" she once asked me, the photo held up close for my inspection. "See how the pattern runs diagonal here on the breast pockets?" She wanted the dresses to be stylish, she said. I told her that they were, that they looked like something a ladies' folk-singing group might buy at the Hudson's Bay Company.

"Was the girl in the white blouse the leader of the group?" I remember asking.

"No," Grandma said, laughing. "The poor soul arrived late and there wasn't enough material!"

Today is my grandmother's yahrzeit, marking one year since her death. In memoriam, I find myself studying this photo, this photo in which my grandma is exactly my age. I long to hear her animated voice telling me about the "girls," the predictable pauses she used for emphasis, the way she brushed over her pain with calm cordiality.

Suddenly I yearn for every particular. Why did Clara arrive in Schwerin late, Grandma? Did you stay in touch with these women? Did they scatter across the globe? Are any of them still alive? Do they have granddaughters?

What was the name of the soldier? Did you ever contact him after you left Shwerin? Grandma, what was it like to cut up Nazis' bed sheets? To wear fabric on which monsters had sweated and slept? What was all of it like?

When we used to look at this photograph together, side-by-side at the kitchen table, my grandma would tell me, "On this day, *mamaleh*, we began to be humans." ■

Alisha Kaplan is a poet and short story writer whose work has appeared in Carousel, The New Quarterly, Branch, The Irish Literary Review, *and elsewhere. A native of Toronto, she now lives in Brooklyn. alishakaplan.com*

Reading "Dear Abby" in Massachusetts

by JAYNE LAMBERT, *as told to* SUSAN SCHNUR

Five years ago, when a new Jewish geriatric campus opened in Dedham, Massachusetts, I grabbed a friend and we started a "Dear Abby" group. I don't remember how we got the idea. Since the beginning, we've met with the same 10 frail women, most in their 90s, every other Wednesday, 10:30 to noon. I call them "my ladies." We just lost our first at 102. To prepare, I bake brownies, cookies, nothing fancy—I love to bake—and Dori cuts and pastes "Dear Abby," and that's the end of it.

"Dear Abby," Dori reads. "When my neighbor walks her dog, it always does its business on my property…." I might ask my ladies, "When you were growing up, did you have a dog?" After another column, I might say: "Did you know anyone who had a gay child?" "Anyone in your family get divorced?" The dirtier the better. When the man has an affair, or there's a little adultery: "If you saw your girlfriend's husband, would you tell?"

My ladies are extremely opinionated. *Extremely.* It's not "I think." It's "I know." They criticize one another, bickering back and forth, and are very caring, very protective. Sometimes it's "Real-Life Dear Abby": A woman in the group who's 100, her son got divorced and she's still close to her daughter-in-law, which infuriates her son. "What would you do, Vivian?" I ask. When Dori was going on vacation with her family, her college-aged son wanted to invite his girlfriend. "Should I get another room?" "Is it appropriate?" My ladies *always* have what to say. Is their advice good? Not really.

"Dear Abby, when my husband and I eat out, he insists on…" My ladies are reminded that they miss things. Like Chinese restaurants. So twice a year, at Hanukah and in the summer, we bring them take-out. You'd think we were bringing gold.

"Dear Abby, my brother-in-law is an alcoholic…" One lady pipes up, "I used to like a cocktail once in a while." Another lady: "Well, you can drink here, you know." "Yeah, I'm sure you could have a drink if you wanted it." "I don't want to drink alone." "Jayne, you always come in the morning. What if you come in the afternoon without the cookies?" They all got doctors' notes, we came with a cooler, and we had wine, crackers, and cheese. Boy, they drank!

My ladies are extremely opinionated. Extremely. It's not "I think." It's "I know."

The "Dear Abby" part is kind of inconsequential. It's the questions you ask after, you have to pull out from them. "Did you allow this when you had a teenager?" I do a lot of gatekeeping. "You have to wait your turn." Some of them can go on forever. "That's a great story, Diane, but let's hear from Ruthie now." A "Dear Abby" group would be a great way to integrate a new resident.

I love to hear my ladies talk about their children; you can tell what kinds of mothers they were. Some are boastful, sometimes their kids come; their kids are older than me. We do a lot of screaming now. Over the years, it's changed. "I lost my hearing aid!" "*What? What?*" We read "Dear Abby" more slowly. They need shouting.

My husband had cancer for six years, and when he recovered—my ladies prayed for him for so long!—I made him come with me. He said, "I love you very much, Jayne, but you talk like they're really with it. Half of them are sleeping." "Yeah, but they wake up. They've gotten old." So you wake them up and you say, "What do you think?" A neat little lady, drop-dead gorgeous, she's failing, not doing well, she falls asleep and I say, "Hey Margie, get up." We celebrate their birthdays; we bring little trinkets from the Dollar Store.

It doesn't matter what you talk about, what matters is *conversation.* I just know this has made a huge difference in my ladies' lives. I've done substantial volunteer work in my life, but this is one of the most beautiful things I've ever engaged in.

My workplace has wanted me to up my hours, but there are certain pieces of my life that I am not willing to give up, like my ladies. I will never give up the ladies. It's weird how special this has become to me. ■

Jayne Lampert volunteers at Newbridge on the Charles, a part of Hebrew SeniorLife, and is the Director of Annual Giving at a social service agency in Massachusetts.

With this issue, Lilith launches a project focusing on the experiences of Jewish women with disabilities. In over 36 years of cutting-edge publishing, Lilith has crafted a feminist lens for examining how gender and dis/ability intersect in the Jewish world. Now, with this new project, we intend to deepen and complicate the coverage of this important subject.

Media reports tend to focus on the work and words of caretakers—for an autistic child, a parent with Alzheimer's, a spouse with chronic illness. These stories are important, but they do not give agency to the disabled person herself. Now, we need to accelerate change, shifting the frame to the women themselves, so that they can deliver the facts about their own experiences.

Disability Oppression

SUSAN NUSSBAUM HAS A LOT TO TEACH THE REST OF US

Susan Nussbaum's witty, alarming, punchy and compulsively readable debut novel, *Good Kings Bad Kings*, has just been issued in paperback; it won the PEN/Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction, created by Barbara Kingsolver. The book is set in a nursing home for young adults with disabilities, and they narrate their lives in their own voices, chapter by chapter. The reader also meets those who harm them, through venality (for-profit nursing home operators, for example) or through ignorance (underpaid and ill-trained attendants, for example). But even with their mobility challenges, these youngsters are able to mobilize themselves in order to drive changes in their own circumstances and to agitate for justice. Nussbaum, a wheelchair user since the 1970s after a car hit her on an icy Chicago street when she was 24, has witnessed—and agitated for—changes in the ways people with disabilities are treated, and she was selected by Utne Reader in 2008 as one of "50 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World" for her work with girls with disabilities.

Nussbaum has plenty to say. Like, "Access, in the architectural sense, is already covered by the ADA and other laws. Talking about acccess is often a distraction from the broader impact of disability oppression."

And: "The New York Times revealed what a shamefully bad job NYC did in evacuating people with disabilities during Sandy. And in Katrina, people in nursing homes in New Orleans were simply euthanized."

Susan Nussbaum talked about her book and her background with Susan Weidman Schneider, in person in New York, by phone from Chicago, and finally by email.

PHOTO: SUZANNE PLUNKETT

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER: **You've written, in an author's note at the end of the book, about how urgent it is to have disabled people not be "othered"—my word, not yours—in order to render their reality accurately. You've observed sharply how disabled people in fiction are always either villains or victims, and that there's never more than one in every work. I want to quote you directly:**

I used to wonder where all the writers who have used disabled characters so liberally in their work were doing their research. When I became a wheelchair-user in the late seventies, all I knew about being disabled I learned from reading books and watching movies, and that scared the shit out of me. Tiny Tim was long-suffering and angelic and was cured in the end. Quasimodo was a monster who loved in vain and was killed in the end, but it was for the best. Lenny was a child who killed anything soft, and George had to shoot him. It was a mercy killing. Ahab was a bitter amputee and didn't care how many died in his mad pursuit to avenge himself on a whale. Laura Wingfield had a limp, so no man would ever love her.

SUSAN NUSSBAUM: Disabled characters are shown as the *only* character with a disability—as if we totally live in a non-disabled world—the one lone character in a sea of others.

What do you think about *Far from the Tree*, the book by Andrew Solomon about parents raising children who are very much unlike themselves, typically because the child has a disability?

I haven't read the newest Solomon book. I did read most of *Noonday Demon* [about depression], and really admired it.

The whole idea of exceptionality feels unnecessary to me, and plain wrong. Another in a long line of euphemisms that serve only to frame disability as abnormal. I don't really mind that he groups disability in with LGBT, but children born of rape? Whatever.

I am not generally attracted to books that reflect on the responses of parents to disabled children, or children who are marginalized for whatever reasons they deviate from "normal." It always seems to confer a kind of martyrdom on the parents, who themselves are viewed as loving their children "in spite of" the disability. I don't doubt the great love and dedication of the parents. I'm sure it's all a very compelling and beautifully rendered read, and probably does speak to many parents in a profound way. But I'm *sooo* tired of hearing from doctors or social workers or other "experts" about the disability experience. I've heard it all before and it has very little to do with my reality. I want to hear about disability from *disabled* people.

The disabled teen and young adult characters you've created in your novel describe their own circumstances, relationships, dreams, wants. None of this comes to the reader through the lens of the "abled." Pointedly, in your notes at the end of the novel, you remind readers that "When African-American characters were written only by white writers, or LGBT characters were written mostly by heteros, and women were written largely by men, culture in America was, in a way, simply a reflection of the imaginings of a privileged segment of the population."

Like when African-American writers started to accurately represent *that* experience, white writers had to look at how they had represented black characters in the past. The more disabled people enter the cultural milieu and write about the experience of being disabled—for real—that will change. And other writers will get these ideas....

What is an example of something that gets elided or denied—or just not noticed—when non-disabled writers are creating the characters or writing the non-fiction pieces about people with disabilities?

I made sure to have sexually active people with disabilities, because everyone is sexual. People writing about disabilities are usually not disabled, so we are often written as non-sexual characters. This is perpetuated in so many ways by the dominant culture—certainly in books and movies that do a very poor job of representing the experience of real disabled people. So it was important for me to write about disabled characters who are fully sexual people. Because that's the truth.

Your characters seem *confidently* sexual. And in the book sexuality is loving, and real, between consenting partners. There's also a sexual predator, an evil "caregiver" employed by the nursing home. But even aides and employees who have warm feelings for their "patients" can't act on their better instincts because of overwork, and the greed and corruption of the nursing home owners.

In real life, occasionally we see news items about the progressive nursing home movement that talk about acknowledging and respecting the sexuality of the residents.

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Let's put that aside for now... "*progressive*" nursing home movement?

OK. So tell us who has been reading your immensely compelling, funny, startling book?

The best is that the disabled community is embracing it. There's a whole disabilities studies community in academia—and they are really taking it up, assigning it all over the place. This is very encouraging to me, *waaaay* beyond what I ever imagined, since the book world is very competitive. Winning the PEN/Bellwether prize made the difference between relative obscurity and getting out there.

You're Jewish, but there's no overtly Jewish character in the novel. What about in your plays?

They all have *disabled* characters. I exploited my own experiences. I am an atheist and I have a strong anti-religion point of view. But a very strong people point of view. I am very big at getting beyond what separates us to what unites us.

You know, I did write a one one-woman show, "Meshuganismo"—about Jewish women who fall in love with Latin men. That had a very inherent Jewish sensibility to it.

The voice of the teenaged girl Yessenia—wry, poignant, edgy and very self-aware—is the first one a reader hears when the book opens. She's talking about the school she went to before she landed in "juvie."

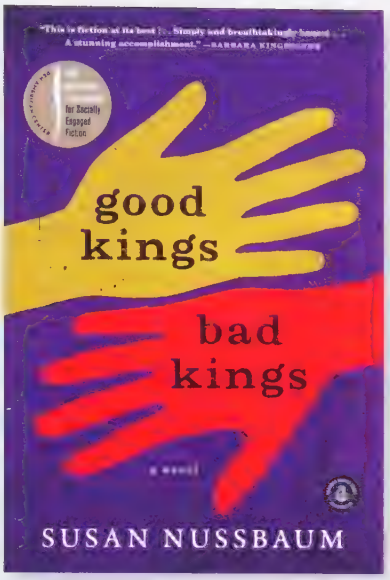
I went there on account of I am physically challenged, and they send the people which have challenges to Hoover. They send people with physical challenges, but also retarded challenges, people been in accidents like brain accidents, or they're blind or what have you. I do not know why they send us all to the same place but that's the way it's always been...I am in tenth grade and I been in cripple this and cripple that my whole sweet, succulent Puerto Rican life.

When you spoke about the novel recently at Rodeph Sholom in New York City, you mentioned that you yourself have an adopted daughter who is disabled.

Yes, I adopted a daughter. I already knew her very well when I adopted her; she was a teenager. She, too, has a disability. The reason I was so interested in maintaining the relationship with her forever is that she is really quite extraordinary—very funny, very tough. It's unusual to have that be an innate quality. Today she has a great job, she's got a wonderful political consciousness. She's married—happily—to a guy I like a lot. And that's it.

What was your own family like as you were growing up?

I came from a privileged background—middle class. My mother was a liberal Democrat. She died 10 years ago of Parkinson's; it



really strip-mined her personality. She was a pistol, who started out doing public relations and then did a lot of local political work for candidates, like McCarthy—Eugene McCarthy, that is.

My dad was an exterminator for years, and then became an actor. My mother had always worked and so she could fill in financially until he started to make money; he worked as an actor and still does.

What about the Jewish piece?

My parents were both atheists, but they still felt it was important to give us—my older brother, sister and me—a sense of cultural identification. Much of it was to please the grandparents, who never seemed particularly religious either, but I think felt that being a Jew was crucial to their experience, and their place in history. We celebrated Passover and Rosh Hashanah for a number of years. We also did a Hannukah thing—kind of a one-night stand as opposed to eight nights—but that was because it was an opportune way to remind us why we weren't getting a cool tree and a million presents.

Religion has always felt unnecessary to me. It never worked for me, even in a metaphorical sense.

It's hard to describe to what extent my Jewish heritage informs my identity. I have a Jewish sensibility, whatever that is. I try to be responsible, to question and struggle with my own biases, to contribute to humanity—not Jewish humanity but all people. I deeply long for an integrated life—to live and work with people of all races and ethnic backgrounds. I'm not looking for ways to set myself apart. We live in such a fractured, frightened, segregated world. I hope for something better.

The Vietnam War was very politicizing. I have an older brother and sister who were both involved in the anti-war movement and the women's movement. I followed suit. I was always a political person, you know? At an early age I seemed to have a perspective on power—who had it and who didn't.

You do understand the workings of power, and you describe yourself an activist for disability rights since a little while after your accident. In your book you portray—in riveting, page-turning scenes—how a for-profit nursing-home business *actually* measures all they do against their bottom line, and not against the good they could do for the people they're serving.

When I became disabled, there was no disabilities rights movement in Chicago. When a place doing disability rights work opened soon after, I joined. It was a transformative experience. The other employees were all disabled in one way or another and they understood every experience I'd had as a disabled person—no accessible bathrooms, no curb cuts in the sidewalks, no accessible public transportation. We would laugh about the kinds of things...the reactions we had from people. We were some of the first disabled people who took to the streets in 1979 and 1980.

You were an actress before the accident. Then you became a playwright. Were you bitten by the theater bug because of your father?

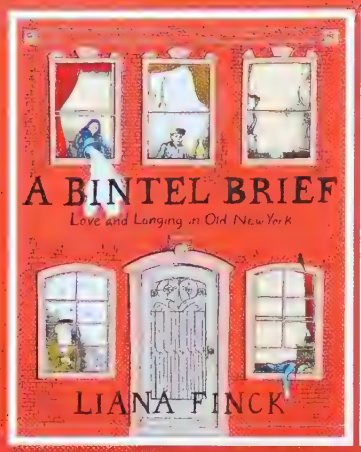
Yes, it seems so. I loved the idea of pretending to be someone else.

But you've said you were angry at the theater.

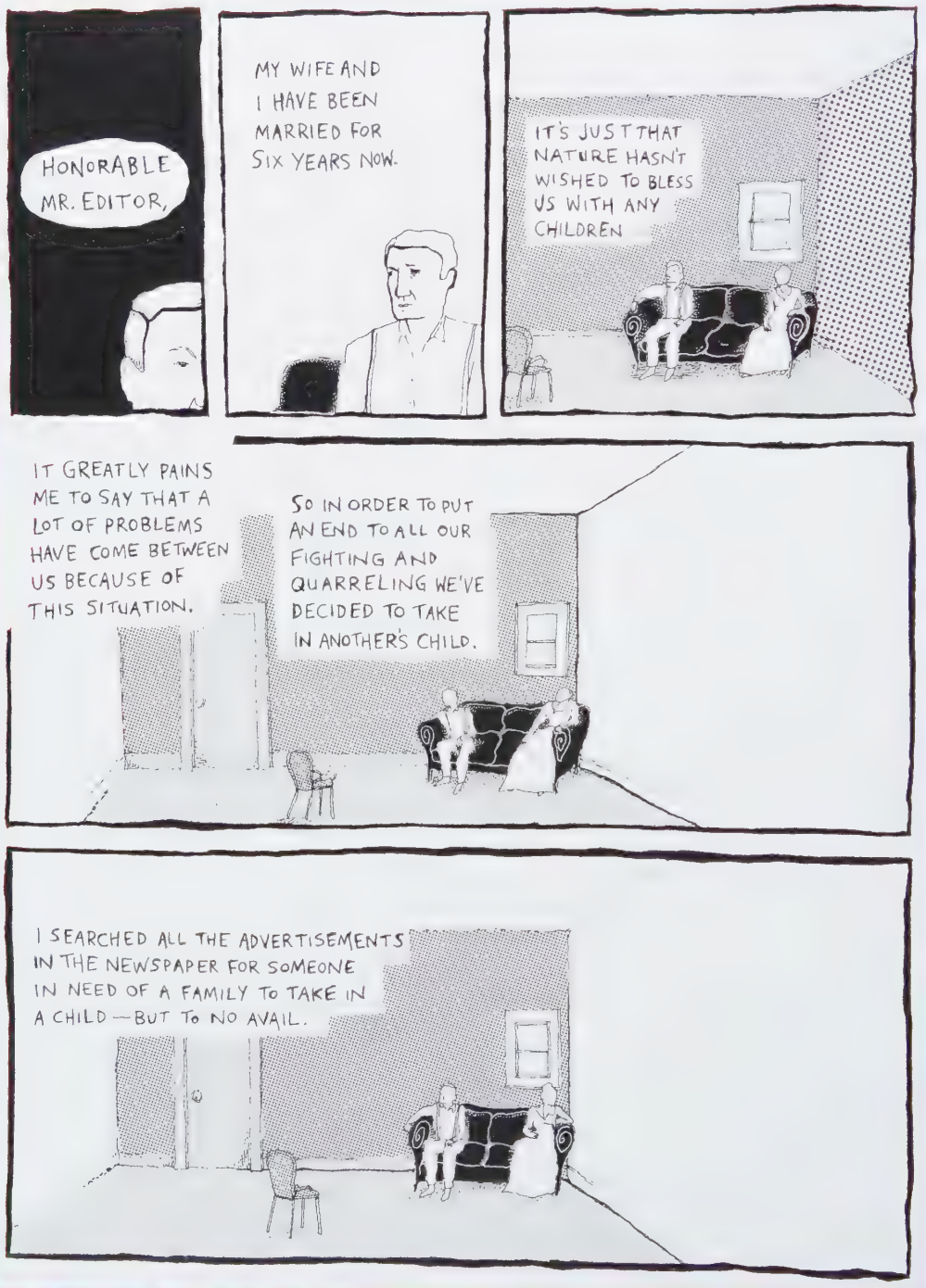
I was pissed because no one would produce my latest play. It just broke my spirit temporarily. It was a play about girls with disabilities who went to a segregated, all-disabled school. I just knew their voices very well. I worked with girls for a long time—that's how I met my daughter. I really loved that work, loved these people. Many of them I keep in touch with on my Facebook page. The play was kind of a wonderful piece—and it did not get picked up.

Sounds a little like "A Chorus Line"?

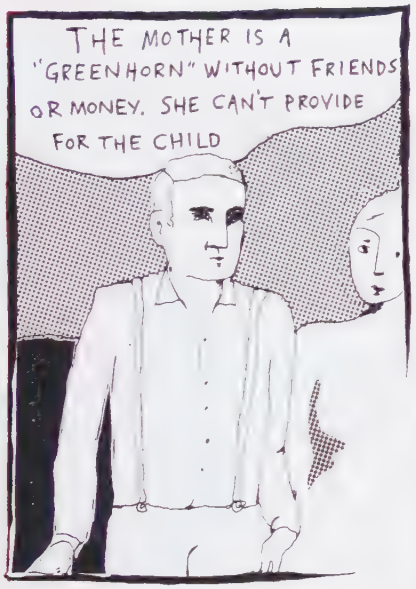
I *wish* it was like Chorus Line! My play takes place during one long day, the day they graduated from high school. They are all really good friends, with one alpha female. You see the conflicts with the girls, then you see them at home. One of the girl's mothers is in prison. All sorts of things. Like the novel, at the end you see that there's a future for some of these girls. And for others, whom you've fallen in love with, you worry that maybe there is none. No matter what they do they may not survive in this world. ■



A Bintel Brief ("A Bundle of Letters"), started in 1906, was the go-to advice column in the Yiddish newspaper The Forward. Sex, work, money and—again and again—family politics. It's all in there. Liana Finck, award-winning artist and writer, imagines scenes from the heartfelt letters, and renders them in astonishing graphic detail.

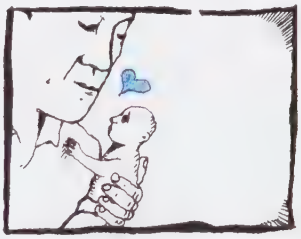

HONORABLE MR. EDITOR,
MY WIFE AND I HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR SIX YEARS NOW.
IT'S JUST THAT NATURE HASN'T WISHED TO BLESS US WITH ANY CHILDREN
IT GREATLY PAINS ME TO SAY THAT A LOT OF PROBLEMS HAVE COME BETWEEN US BECAUSE OF THIS SITUATION.
SO IN ORDER TO PUT AN END TO ALL OUR FIGHTING AND QUARRELING WE'VE DECIDED TO TAKE IN ANOTHER'S CHILD.
I SEARCHED ALL THE ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE NEWSPAPER FOR SOMEONE IN NEED OF A FAMILY TO TAKE IN A CHILD—BUT TO NO AVAIL.

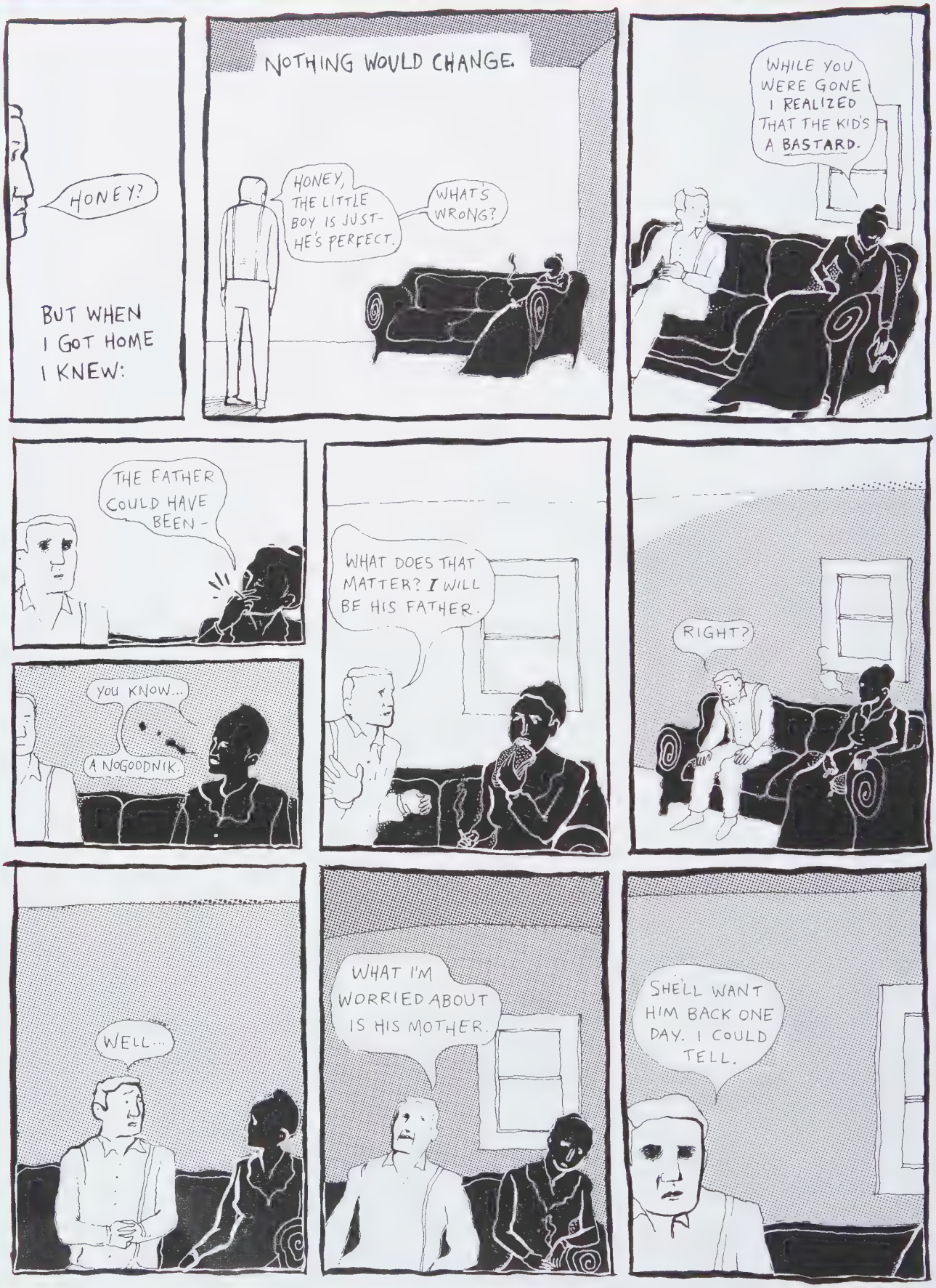
THIS WEEK, HOWEVER, A COUNTRYMAN OF OURS CAME TO US AND TOLD US THAT A YOUNG LADY IN HIS HOUSE HAD AN ILLEGITIMATE CHILD AND THAT SHE WISHES TO "GIFT IT AWAY" TO A PROPER FAMILY.

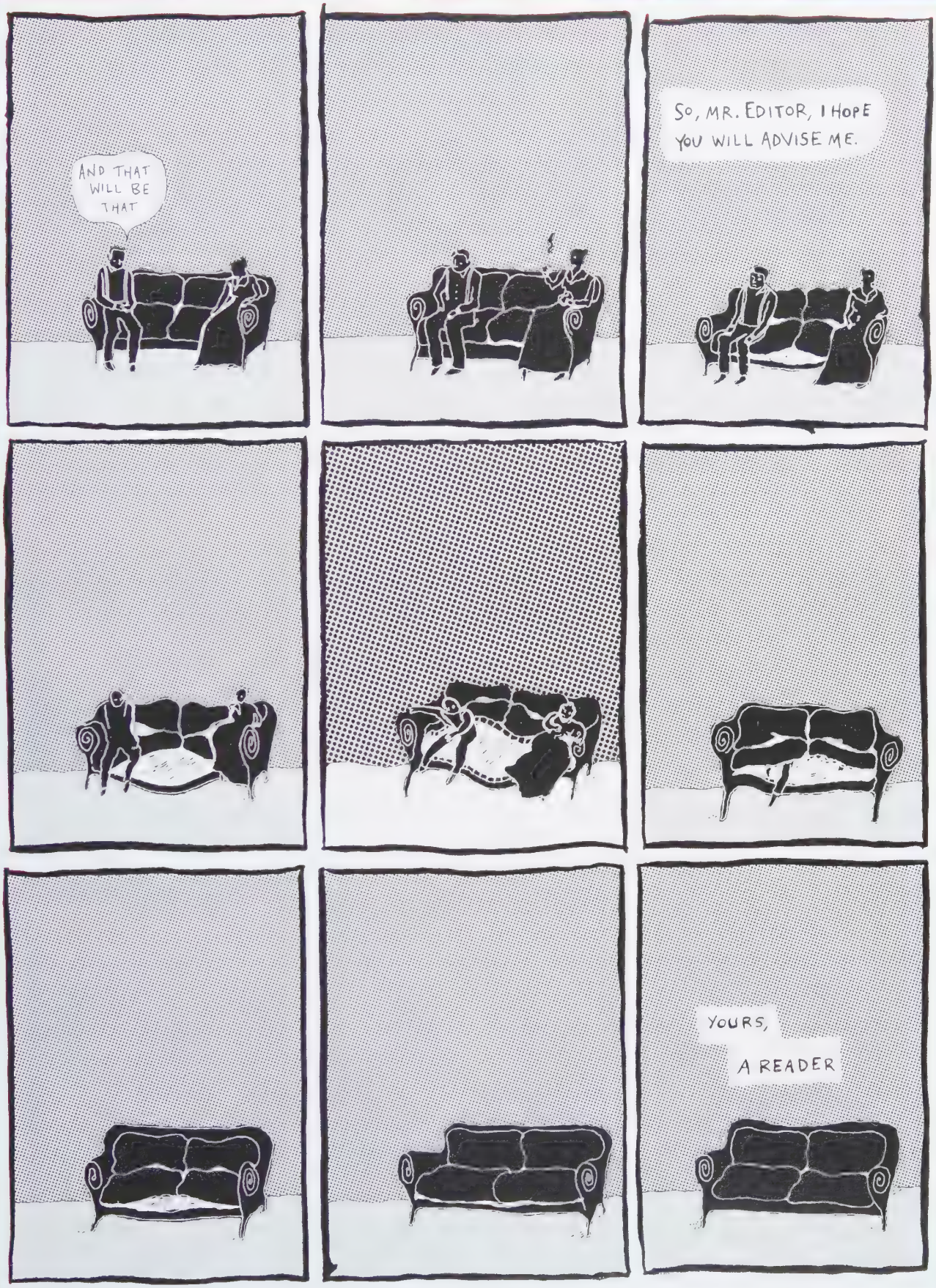


I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO GO SEE THE BABY RIGHT AWAY. THE MOTHER CAN'T KEEP HIM MUCH LONGER, AND THIS IS THE KIND OF DECISION YOU SHOULDN'T THINK ABOUT TOO LONG.

THE BABY WAS JUST A SPECK OF A THING IN HIS MOTHER'S ARMS.




HONEY?
BUT WHEN I GOT HOME I KNEW:
NOTHING WOULD CHANGE.
HONEY, THE LITTLE BOY IS JUST- HE'S PERFECT.
WHAT'S WRONG?
WHILE YOU WERE GONE I REALIZED THAT THE KID'S A BASTARD.
THE FATHER COULD HAVE BEEN -
YOU KNOW... A NOGOODNIK.
WHAT DOES THAT MATTER? I WILL BE HIS FATHER.
RIGHT?
WELL...
WHAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT IS HIS MOTHER.
SHE'LL WANT HIM BACK ONE DAY. I COULD TELL.



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SAME PAGE,

by ILANA KURSHAN

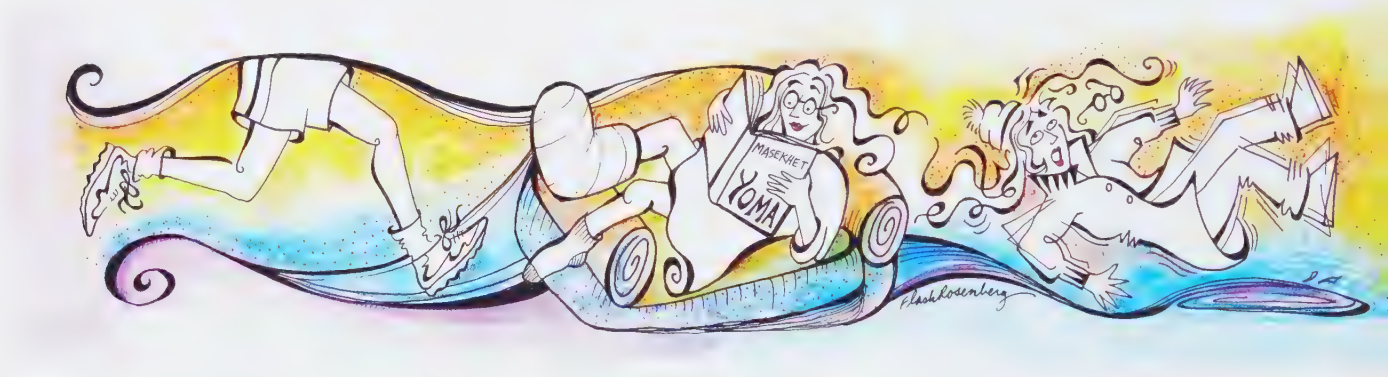
The day I completed the Talmud section *Masekhet Yoma*, I had my cast taken off. Six weeks before, I broke my arm during the big Jerusalem winter storm, which began the same day we learned in *daf yomi* (the daily study of a page of Talmud) about Hillel's ascent to the top of a snowy roof to listen in on Shmaya and Avtalyon's class in Talmudic Babylonia (35b).

I was heading out to the garbage to deposit a bag of dirty diapers when I slipped on black ice and tried to block the fall with my hand. Under ordinary circumstances, this would have been inconvenient; but with three kids under the age of three, two of whom can't walk (and one of whom rarely walks where you want him to), it was nearly impossible. Daniel. and I joked that we had a one-working-arm-to-child ratio. I learned to carry the twins in the crook of my arm, to cut vegetables with one hand, and to fold laundry with my elbow. All the while, in my reading, I was following the high priest through the chambers and courtyards of the Temple, observing as he gathered up the incense to take into the holy of holies. He took a pan in his right hand and a ladle in his left, a task which I could not have completed without two working arms. Nor could I have performed *kemitza*, which involves scooping up the incense underneath the middle three fingers of the hand while extending the thumb and pinky (47a). The rabbis describe kemitza as the most difficult part of Temple ritual—even without a cast extending from elbow to knuckles.

I have broken two bones in my life, and, ironically, the previous injury took place seven-and-a-half years ago—when I learned Masekhet Yoma for the first time. Then, it was my foot that I broke, probably from too much running and not enough stretching. I remember receiving the x-ray results just as I was learning the famous story in the Mishnah about the two priests who raced each other up the ramp of the altar to clear away the ashes; one pushed his friend in an effort to get ahead, and his friend stumbled and broke his foot. From this point, they decided to conduct a lottery to determine which priest would perform the various parts of the Temple service (22a). Presumably the priest who had broken his foot was then barred from the Temple on account of his injury, because priests, the *cohanim*, had to be in perfect condition to perform their ritual duties, whereas I spent the next few weeks on my couch with my leg propped up and Masekhet Yoma on my lap, making my way into the holy of holies and then back out to read Torah in the Temple courtyard.

In order to heal, bones have to set, and so I find myself wondering what has set in my life in the time between my two encounters with Masekhet Yoma.

The word *yoma* is Aramaic for "the day," and refers to Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. But in Hebrew the word for "the day," *hayom*, is also the word for "today," which points to a significant difference between my study of Yoma then and now. Seven-and-a-half years ago, when I learned Yoma for the first time, I never had any doubts about how I was spending "today." Each morning I would learn Talmud with a study partner at the Conservative Yeshiva and then head to my job (at the literary agency where I still work) from noon until 7 P.M. In the evenings I would attend various classes throughout the city—a *parsha shiur* (a class on the weekly Torah portion) one night, a discussion on Jewish philosophy the next. Other evenings I would go to my book club, where we read and discussed a different Hebrew novel each month. When I came home late in the evening, I would learn daf yomi and collapse in bed so that I could wake up early to jog the next morning (until I broke my foot, of course). Each day had its own schedule, mapped out like the order of the priest's activities on Yom Kippur. And each day was full of activities I enjoyed—learning Torah, working with books, exercising, attending classes, spending time with friends.



Even so, I could not have told you where my life was heading—and it wasn't just because I had one broken foot. I did not know if I would ever advance in my job, or fall in love again, or become a mother, or stay in Israel. All the big questions were still unanswered. I enjoyed how I spent each day, but I had no idea what life would look like someday in the future. Indeed, part of the reason I began learning daf yomi in 2006 was an attempt to shore up against a terrifying future in which nothing seemed certain except that I was getting older. If I learned a page of Talmud each day, I thought, then with each passing day I would not just be one day older, but also one day wiser. By the time I finished the cycle, I'd be 35. This seemed terribly old to my 27-year-old self. If

SEVEN YEARS LATER

I hadn't had children by then, I thought, then surely I never would. And if I hadn't reached a satisfying place in my career, I thought, then surely it was all over for me professionally. All future Yom Kippur observances would be full of regret at missed opportunities, and I would never be able to forgive myself.

Returning to Yoma for the second time, after seven Yom Kippur holidays have elapsed in the interim, I see it all in a very different light. The night before Yom Kippur, the young priests were responsible for ensuring that the high priest did not fall asleep, lest he become impure from a seminal emission. If he started to drift off, they would beat him with their fingers and tell him to stand up and then lie himself down on the cold floor so as to jolt himself awake (19b). This is not unlike what Matan does when he wakes up before dawn and wants us to come play with him. Daniel taught him that he is not allowed to wake up until the sun rises, and we leave his shade open a crack at night so that he can make this determination for himself. In this sense, Matan is like the high priests charged with determining exactly when the sun rises on Yom Kippur morning, at which point they would announce "*Barkai*," the sun is shining (28a). Matan bounds into our room in his furry one-piece pajamas and announces, "Sun is up! Time to play! Get up, Imma" And before I can look at my watch or even open my eyes, he is tapping with his fingers on my forehead, encouraging me to come help him with a puzzle. The rest of the morning unfolds in a tired blur of diaper changing, nursing, dressing the girls in their pink (Liav) and purple (Tagel) outfits, and reheating the French toast that I fried in a pan the night before by dipping leftover challah in egg and milk and scooping in some cinnamon with my middle three fingers.

These days I have significant doubts and insecurities about how I spend each "today." Rarely do I feel like I am using my unique talents to make a contribution to the world, nor do I feel a sense of satisfaction when I look back at any given day. When we drop off the three kids at their various child care places at 8 A.M., I feel guilty about the time I am not with them and concerned about whether I am doing what is best for them. I wish I could say that I forget about the kids entirely and immerse myself in writing and studying until the 3 P.M. pickup. But I continue to think about them as I edit articles, translate books, and proofread translations before submitting them to the original authors. I enjoy my work, but I would not say that I have discovered my true calling in life, or that I am engaged in divine service. From the moment the high priest immerses himself in the mikvah for the first time on Yom Kippur morning until the people of Israel accompany him to his home at the end of the day, the Talmud details every single step he takes. As such, Masekhet Yoma is a model for what it means for all our steps to be directed towards the service of heaven. In this sense I have a long way to go.

On the other hand (and I'm grateful to have just received that other hand back), while I can't say I'm satisfied or proud with how I spend each and every "today," many of the larger questions of "someday" seem to have resolved themselves. There is no doubt in my mind that when I married Daniel, I won the lottery. I could not imagine a kinder, wiser, more loving person with whom to spend my life—even if I rarely have time to tell him that anymore. Our children are beautiful and beaming and seem to be healthy, though not a day passes when I don't worry about the one who refuses to feed himself, or the one who still won't crawl. We have made a home in Jerusalem where, from our back window, we can see the Temple Mount where the high priests once performed the Yom Kippur service. If given the opportunity to enter the Holy of Holies and offer only a short prayer, as the high priest was instructed on Yom Kippur (53b), I would use those precious moments to thank God for all these blessings. It took two cycles of daf yomi, but I feel that I have finally learned the lesson of this tractate, namely that *Yoma* is about the convergence of both meanings of *hayom*. It is about the day that "today" is "the day," the most important day on the Jewish calendar. But it is also about realizing that this convergence happens every day—that our lives at this moment are not a prelude to a future someday, but that this is it, *Barkai*, the sun is up, Imma! No sooner does this realization dawn on me than I get out of bed, extend my arms to embrace my son, and step forwards into the rest of my life. ■

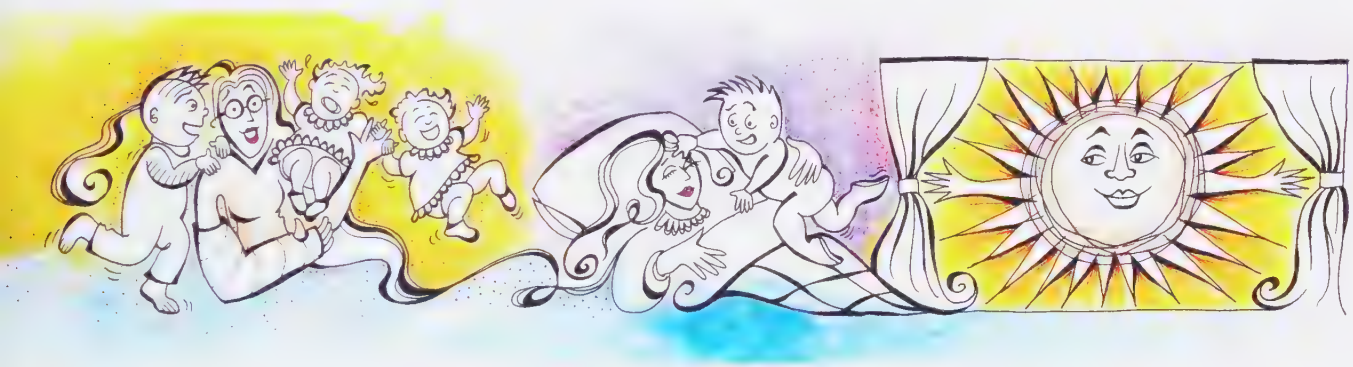


ILLUSTRATION BY FLASH ROSENBERG

Ilana Kurshan reads, learns, works and mothers in Jerusalem.

The Young Suffragist's Diagnosis

fiction by AYELET WALDMAN

In the spring of 1913, nearly a decade ago, I was asked by a colleague to undertake the analysis of his niece, a young lady of 19 years, whom he described as suffering from neurasthenia complicated by chronically recurrent dyspepsia of an hysterical origin. My acquaintanceship with my referring colleague, a prominent Pest physician specializing in disorders of the kidney and urethra, was of long standing and fair intimacy. He was a fellow member of the board of governors of the Magyar Israelite Medical Association and also a fellow alumnus of the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna. My final year at that august institution was Herr Dr. S.'s first, and we both lodged at the Pension Wettendorfer, which had the distinction of being one of the few pensions serving Jewish medical students to be furnished with an indoor commode. I was less well acquainted with Herr Dr. S.'s brother, though we traveled in similar social circles. Prior to assuming her treatment, I had on a few occasions the privilege of meeting the charming young Nina S. She had impressed me as a psychically normal girl, though perhaps inclined by virtue of her high intelligence to neurotic excitability when in stimulating company. The S. family is of fine reputation, possessing among its members a number of wealthy financiers, attorneys, and at least one court councillor. It was thus with great interest, even pleasure, that I anticipated Nina S.'s arrival in my surgery on the morning of May 5, 1913.

I wish I could say that Miss S. greeted our appointment with similar optimism and good cheer. On the contrary, when she entered the room, she was irritated, even angry. Her dress, of the reform style, uncorseted and loose flowing, was of winter wool, gray and gloomy in color, matching her demeanor. The day itself was fine, a harbinger of what I hoped would be an especially pleasant spring, and I could not help but notice that her attire stood in marked contrast to the sprightly floral muslins that my own daughters wore that day. Though Miss S. denied being warm, I nonetheless opened a window to give her the benefit of the pleasant lilac-scented breeze.

Miss S. refused to take her place on the analysand's couch, despite the cheerful nosegay of the season's last violets that my wife had thoughtfully placed on the small table by the head. Instead she perched stiffly on a chair, her mouth drawn into a thin line, quite a feat considering the generosity of her plump lower lip.

"How can I help you, my dear?" I said, my tone far more avuncular than forensic. Over the previous few years, as I had progressed in my own analysis with the brilliant Sándor Ferenczi and learned from him the utility of empathic reciprocity in the analyst/analysand relationship, I had begun to treat my patients with the love and affection they often lacked and craved. Though I know the S.'s to be devoted, even overindulgent, parents of their three children, I was confident that Miss S., like all my patients, would respond better to affection than to formality. However, my concern aggravated rather than consoled her, and she bristled.

"I am afraid, Dr. Zobel," she said, "that you have been misled by my father and my uncle. I am not, in fact, in need of your assistance, at least not medical."

"Ah!" I said. "But you are in need of another kind of assistance?"

"The only thing I need is for you to convince my father that I am not in the early stages of dementia praecox."

"Surely your father has no fear of such a drastic diagnosis. You uncle certainly expressed nothing of the kind to me."

Miss S. was fair, with yellow hair and a porcelain complexion uncommon in people of our race. Her delicate skin showed her every mood, and her cheeks and throat now blushed pink. "Do you know what inspired my father to insist on this appointment?" she asked.

"Your uncle raised the possibility of neurasthenia."

"Do I seem neurasthenic to you?"

She was hardly enervated; rather she radiated energy. This alone did not, however, disprove her uncle's diagnosis. Fatigue, though generally a primary symptom of the disorder, is not always present. Depression and anxiety can and often are expressed as precisely the kind of agitation and irritability that Miss S. was now exhibiting.

In a soothing voice, I said, "Your uncle also told me that you suffer from a pain in your stomach."

"He told you that this pain was dyspeptic and recurrent?"

"You are well versed in the terminology, I see." I was not surprised at Nina's facility. Familiarity with medical jargon is characteristic of a certain kind of hypochondriacal patient.

"I should hope so," Miss S. said. "I am preparing to enter medical college next year."

"Are you? I was not aware."

"Yes, I am, despite the fact that neither my father nor my uncle approves of women physicians."

Since the ministerial statute of 1895 allowed for women to enter the Faculty of Medicine here in Budapest, there had been a great influx of female students, though I myself had not yet been forced to confront them in my neurology and psychiatry lectures. Though I did not confess as much to my patient, I am obliged to admit to having possessed an ambivalence about the presence of young lady students in my chosen profession. There are areas, such as the fields of hygiene, pediatrics, and even obstetrics, that are in many ways suited to the female mind and sensibility. Women are naturally predisposed to care for the family, children, and the means of reproduction, and there are certain classes of women who can perform these functions competently and perhaps even more sensitively than men. However, I had concerns about exposing young ladies of class and discernment both to

the rigors and to the harsh physical realities of modern medicine. Many of the common and necessary parts of a student physician's training would be offensive and disturbing to such young ladies. I think I can be forgiven for rebelling against the image of girls like Miss S. or my own daughters, girls from conservative and proper Jewish homes, examining the pustulating papules of a patient suffering from secondary-stage syphilis.

I could not help but sympathize with Mr. S.'s antipathy to his daughter's choice of profession and was relieved that my own daughters had shown no such inclinations. In fact, on that very morning, my wife and I had determined to accept on behalf of our eldest daughter, Erzsébet, the marriage suggested by an elderly relative who made her living facilitating such arrangements. The young man in question was himself a student of medicine, and while considering Miss S.'s ambitions, I for a moment entertained the ludicrous notion of Erzsébet meeting her intended for the first time not in her mother's parlor but rather in the autopsy theater, their hands mutually immersed in the viscera of a diseased corpse.

I determined, however, not to alienate my young patient by allowing her to see my doubts about the suitability of her ambitions. I said, "Do you, as a fledgling physician, agree with your uncle's diagnosis of your symptoms?"

"No. The pain, while recurrent, is not dyspeptic. Nor do I suffer from abdominal ulcers. I suffer from"—here she hesitated and flushed but continued—"I suffer from nothing more than severe menstrual cramping." I could see that she was doubly embarrassed, both by the topic and by her own shame in discussing it, and this affirmed my feelings about elegant and cultured women and the medical profession. A young girl's pretty flush when referring to such matters is understandable, even desirable, but a doctor can feel no such compunctions.

Miss S. rushed on, "It's only that my father does not understand that most women experience these symptoms. It's not a disease. It's normal."

Maintaining a dry and direct tone of voice in order to assure her that I found our conversation to be utterly benign—an analyst, after all, must speak without indignation or revulsion on all topics, even the most bizarre of sexual perversions, and certainly something as commonplace as menstruation—I said, "Some cramping is normal, I agree. However, it is not uncommon for intense pain during the menstrual period to be hysterical in nature, not physical, and thus resolvable with treatment and analysis." I refrained at this moment from addressing the most likely source of her pain, excessive masturbation and a consequent shame response. There would be time, once she grew trusting of me, to lead her toward this logical conclusion. I continued, "How intense is your pain?"

For a moment Miss S. did not reply, but then, grudgingly, she said, "Very."

"Wouldn't you like it to be less so?"

"Of course."

"Well, then perhaps I can help you. Here is what I suggest. Let us meet a few times to explore this pain of yours, to consider if it might have a genesis traumatic rather than physical. If we are successful in ameliorating it, then that will be wonderful. If not, then what will we have lost but a few hours of time, time spent in one another's surely not-unpleasant company?"

She frowned and said, "I won't be hypnotized."

"Why not?"

"I don't wish to be."

"Well, then I shall not hypnotize you. Though I must say, by precluding hypnosis you do remove one of the analyst's most artful tools. Perhaps you'll change your mind."

"I won't."

"There are many other means to our mutual end of relieving your pain. Conversation, exploration, massage."

"Massage?"

"Dr. Sigmund Freud has had marvelous results with gentle massage in the treatment of hysteria. This is something we might explore together. Again, only if you are willing."

She was silent for a few moments, weighing, I imagined, the unpleasantness of her monthly pain against the indignity of ceding to her father's insistence on treatment.

Finally, she said, "Dr. Zobel, there is one thing I ask of you."

"What is that, my dear?"

"I ask only that if you determine that there is no psychical remedy for my symptoms, but that they are, rather, purely physical and normal, in short, if you find me to be sane, you tell this to my father."

"Of course. It is my obligation as your physician to inform your father of my diagnosis. I would do nothing else."

"Good."

"Earlier you mentioned that you believe your father to fear that you suffer from dementia praecox. Why is that?"

"My father is a great reader."

"Is he? He has this trait in common with his brother, then. Your uncle and I have often shared books with one another."

"Recently he received a book by someone named Alexander Pilcz."

Miss S. said, "Pilcz's book has convinced Papa that I, like so many Jewish women, am doomed to fall ill with dementia praecox and spend my life wound up in restraining sheets in an insane asylum, screaming obscenities and tearing out my eyelashes."

"There are many other means to our mutual end of relieving your pain. Conversation, exploration, massage."

I laughed at the hyperbole of her image, and she graced me with a small smile. I was delighted to see how easily Miss S. adopted my own playful attitude. Despite herself, the young lady was enjoying our conversation. Though modesty usually prevents me from saying so quite so blatantly, I would be remiss in not alerting the reader to my facility with this kind of patient. Young women have always responded well to treatment with me. They flourish under my care because I am comfortable with them, having daughters of my own. I have a natural affinity for the young of the gentler sex, and they for me.

"Would you like to know what evidence he has for this?" she continued.

"I would."

She ticked them off on her fingers. "Number one, that I insist on studying medicine, a sure sign of pending insanity, don't you think? Number two, and this is probably an even-greater offense in his mind, that I refuse to consider marrying the boy he and my mother chose for me when I was still in swaddling clothes."

I interrupted. "You are betrothed?"

"No, I am certainly not betrothed. It is only that Mama and one of her cousins have been scheming since we were babies for their children to marry, and Papa is, if anything, even more eager for the alliance."

"Do I know this young man?"

"Probably. It's Ignác E."

"The son of Baron Móric E.?"

"No. The son of Jene and Berta E. of Nagyvárad. A lesser cousin of the baron's. Though they are certainly wealthy enough, as my mother never tires of telling me. Shall I continue presenting my father's evidence for my dementia, or has my refusal of the proposal of a member of the illustrious E. family, no matter how minor a branch from how minor a distant city, convinced you that my father is right?"

I could sympathize with her father's frustration at his daughter's refusal to acquiesce to the match. The object of my Erzsébet's pending betrothal, while a fine young man from a family in good standing in the community, was nowhere near as illustrious as Nina's potential husband, yet were Erzsébet to take against him, I would be most annoyed. Still, dementia praecox? Hardly.

"I will reserve judgment on the suitability of the young E.," I told her. "Pray continue."

"The third evidence of my supposed insanity is that I refuse to lace my corsets so tightly that my eyes bug out from my head, like other girls my age. The fourth is that I spend my own allowance to subscribe to the journal Women and Society. The fifth, that I not only attended a lecture by Mrs. Rózsa Schwimmer but dared to suggest to my father that he might consider joining the Men's League for Women's Suffrage . . ."

At this I could not restrain a bellow of laughter. The idea of the pontifical fogy Marcus S., vice president of the Israelite Congregation of Pest, a man ever attired in sober black, never plaid, morning coats, who'd sooner wear a boot on his head than replace his top hat with a stylish bowler, petitioning the king to give the women of Austria and Hungary the vote was, perhaps, the most amusing idea I'd heard in months.

"And finally," Miss S. said, acknowledging my laughter with a raised eyebrow, "number six, that I have befriended Gizella Weisz, who is not merely a feminist and disciple of Mrs. Rózsa Schwimmer but also a dwarf."

"A dwarf?"

"Yes, a dwarf. And what of it? Half of my father's own friends are certified imbeciles, so why should he view my friendship with a dwarf as a sure sign of insanity?"

"You're being a bit harsh on your parents' society, are you not? Though not a friend, I certainly consider your father a fond acquaintance. Perhaps I am an imbecile, too?"

"Perhaps you are, Dr. Zobel. I'm afraid I don't know you well enough to say yet."

The clock in the hall chimed. "And I'm afraid our time together is up," I said. "But we shall continue this discussion tomorrow, yes? Shall we say ten o'clock?"

She sprang to her feet. "All right. Yes. We can meet again. But I have an appointment with my tutor to prepare for my matura in the morning, so it must be in the afternoon."

How well I remembered the strain I underwent during my own final examinations from gymnasium. No fewer than three young boys in my class attempted suicide in the days immediately before. Given that she was in the midst of this arduous preparation, Miss S. struck me as remarkably composed. And though I knew neurosis to be an expert masquerader, still for a moment I could not help but think that the girl, though probably neurasthenic, was as sane as I.

"Of course," I said. "I will have to adjust my calendar, but I shall send word first thing in the morning." Though my afternoon clients, women of leisure, would not object overmuch to being shuffled around, I would refrain from telling them that it was for the sake of a busy young girl studying for her final exams. That they might not have tolerated so willingly.

Miss S. extended her hand, and I kissed it.

"Thank you, Herr Dr. Zobel," she said. "This was not as miserable an experience as I had expected it would be."

"My dear, Nina . . ." I waited for a moment to gauge whether she would take insult at the familiar use of her given name. As she appeared unoffended, I continued, "If we accomplish nothing more than alleviating such unpleasant expectations, then I will consider our time together to be well spent." ■

Ayelet Waldman is the author of the novels Red Hook Road, Love and Other Impossible Pursuits *and* Daughter's Keeper, *as well as of the essay collection* Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities and Occasional Moments of Grace, *and the* Mommy-Track Mystery *series.*

Excerpt from Love and Treasure *by Ayelet Waldman. ©2014 by Ayelet Waldman. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Mary Evans Inc.*

AYELET WALDMAN *on chance, and obsession*

Folded into Ayelet Waldman's illuminating new novel, *Love and Treasure*, is enough provocative material to fuel Jewish and feminist discussions for months to come. Paternalism and tenderness in the early days of psychoanalysis, the loosening of attitudes and corsets for progressive women of the European upper classes, the emergence of first-wave feminism and the suffragist movement. And: art and jewelry looted by the Nazis, controversies over the founding of the State of Israel, the tight family lives of Syrian Jews in the Diaspora. **Ayelet Waldman** talked to **Susan Weidman Schneider** just before the book's publication.

SWS: So, in 2013 a young New York lawyer goes to Budapest to return a necklace her Jewish grandfather took from the Gold Train—filled with valuables that had belonged to Jews in Hungary when the Nazis rounded them up in 1944. Was it thinking about the lives behind those watches and rings and lockets that spurred you? What triggered this broad-sweep historical novel?

AW: I was a Holocaust-obsessed teenager, but I was *not* familiar with the specific history of Hungary—and had no idea about this train! Here's the real story of how I came to this. One of my dear friends became ambassador to Hungary just when I was starting a new novel. I wanted to visit and deduct it from my taxes so googled "Hungary, Holocaust, art." The Hungarian Gold Train was my first hit. As soon as I read that Wikipedia entry, I knew this was my story.

I found that when one goes to a foreign country to research a novel, it is very helpful to have a friend who is the U.S. ambassador. A brilliant feminist historian in Budapest, Judith Acsady, told me that if I was interested in the pre-WWI period I'd have to read this amazing women's newspaper. I spent a week in the archives of the Budapest main library with a young graduate student in women's history translating for me material about the suffragists. The whole book just landed in my lap then—from women not being allowed out without an escort to creating a women's movement in just a few years! "A big hat is a kind of imprisonment," wrote Rosa Schwimmer, the Jewish feminist leader—and she also wrote a critique of the dowry system as sexual slavery of women—side by side! So impressive!

There's a whole archive of Rosa photos in the New York Public Library. That the

1913 Seventh Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Budapest was photographed is incredible!

SWS: After WWII, the novel spools back to the early years of the 20th century, and enmeshes us in the facts and the drama of the suffragist movement in Eastern Europe, which was fueled in part by Rosa Schwimmer and her secretary, Gizella Weisz, a Jewish dwarf from an illustrious family of scholars and performers.

AW: Later, Gizella and her family were both tortured and saved by Mengele in Auschwitz.

SWS: Then you have the disaffected Israeli guy, Amitai, from a large Syrian Jewish family of art dealers. He has been pretty immune to the history of the Holocaust, and feels resistant even to the State of Israel, but he's also on a search for looted art.

AW: Israel. I even made aliyah myself once for 6 months. I had a boyfriend who was a Syrian Jew—his parents were sent by Youth Aliyah to live on a *yekkish* [German Jewish] kibbutz. I visited them. Those Germans on the kibbutz were as German as I had ever experienced.

My Israeli publisher, before they bought this book, said, "Seems a little anti-Semitic." Of course my British publisher said, "It seems a little pro-Israel."

SWS: Characters in the book talk about how post-Shoah Zionists used the survivors to move world opinion—and the British—to help form the State of Israel.

AW: I used actual quotes. When an Israeli character in the book says of the Holocaust survivors that "They are garbage," I pulled the quotes from letters of Ben-Gurion. I knew I couldn't write this without being accused of anti-Zionism, so I quoted directly. The idea that those who survived could only have survived by evil means, that they were broken and ruined by their experience and *also* evil.... They *needed* the boatloads of survivors, and especially children—to be fired upon—and the British would be forced to turn over Israel.

SWS: Nothing ties up totally neatly in this book. Ilona, a young Hungarian woman who survived the camps, manages to get smuggled into Italy, then to pre-state Israel. We never hear about her again.

AW: I wanted to mirror the sense of the fragmented stories—especially regarding the Holocaust. You can never really know the truth when people have vanished and their stories have vanished. You can only imagine—and some of it is wrong. I wanted readers not to know—mirroring the sense I had in doing my research that some isn't knowable. ■

REVIEWS

A Dementia Epidemic

Ever since reading her sweet and mischievous picture book *Tell Me A Mitzi* to my kids, decades ago, I have loved the writing of **Lore Segal**. In one of these stories, little Mitzi gets up very early one morning, changes her baby brother, helps him out of his crib, out of their apartment and into a cab to visit their grandparents. Only… she doesn't know the address, so the driver patiently helps them out of the cab, they go back home, get into bed, and their parents never suspect their travails. In a second story, the little brother, a bit older now and at a parade, complains so loudly about wanting gum that the president of the United States stops his entourage to give the boy a piece. And in the final story, everyone in the household, one by one—including the grandmother who comes to help—gets the flu. With everyone in bed you get a sense of the world falling apart, yet this is all somehow normal, and even amusing.

Perhaps in these, her early stories for children, we can see the seeds of themes—of a child taking on normally adult responsibilities; of the power of words, of speaking up; and of the world seeming to come apart but going on—that have long intrigued the author. In 1938, when she was 10 years old, Segal was, as a Kindertransport child, sent alone by her parents from Vienna to England, where she took upon herself—as per her dad's instructions—to make every effort to secure the escape of the rest of her family. She eventually made her way to the United States, and two of her novels, *Other People's Houses,* and *Her First American,* tell something of her own life story.

Now we have Segal's tender and irreverent portrait of old age, ***Half the Kingdom***. This is a sobering yet somehow even hilarious novel, charming and wise. In it, the lives of old friends with histories, long-married couples, elders and their adult children, colleagues, former lovers, friends and friends of friends converge in and around a hospital where everyone over the age of 62 is coming down with dementia, including the senior members of the think tank hired to study this strange and alarming situation.

In one subplot, a gift to the aspiring writers among us, a writer's manuscript submitted to a magazine has been neither acknowledged nor rejected, and she seems unable to stop herself from patiently inventing new communications, at turns furious and friendly, hopeful and hopeless, to address the indignity of being ignored. She never actually mails the letters she drafts which Segal seamlessly weaves into the main predicament of this novel:

"The ambulance attendant is new at the job. He suspends his pen over the report, which he will hand in when they arrive at the hospital. He is supposed to check either 'constant' or 'when you move'. Next question: "Would you call this a dull or a stabbing pain?" "Dull? Hell hell hell! No, I would not call this pain a dull pain! God. And I would not call it 'stabbing'." The man in pain focuses on the pain, the exact location of which he is unable to pinpoint. He compares what he feels with what he understand the word 'stabbing' to connote, and stabbing is not what this is, nor is it 'biting', 'shooting', 'burning', 'searing', 'throbbing', 'grinding', or 'gnawing'. He searches the language and does not find in its vocabulary the word that names this peculiar excruciation. 'Get me Roget's Thesaurus!' shrieks the man in pain."

Don't miss this delightfully playful and humane novel.

NAOMI DANIS *is Lilith's managing editor and author of* It's Tot Shabbat.

Those Jewish Brits

Though a relatively small community, Anglo-Jewry has lately produced a spate of highly successful fiction. These include two recent offerings that address female Jewish protagonists and their struggles with community.

Eve Harris's ***The Marrying of Chani Kaufman***, longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, is set primarily in a contemporary ultra-Orthodox community in Northwest London. Told from multiple perspectives—the young bride-to-be Chani, her fiance, his mother, her mother, the matchmaker, the *rebbetzin* who prepares Chani for her nuptials, the rabbi, their son and his secret lover of Nigerian descent—this suspenseful and well-paced tale centers around the fears and tensions surrounding the upcoming wedding. Or perhaps even more pronounced, the upcoming wedding night. Sex—recreational and procreational—is at the forefront of these characters' minds. The older ones grapple with a miscarriage that catalyzes the end of a marriage, the younger ones are mystified by their sexuality (which they are taught nothing about) and terrorized by the thought of losing their virginity as new marriage looms.

Chani, at the center, is curious and strong-minded, and the novel considers how these traits make her difficult to 'marry off'. "Unaware of their own mediocrity, young people demanded perfection in a spouse." Along with gender, the narrative explores intimacy, interactions with the secular world, and the complex family dynamics in families with so many children. It sheds light on the private experience of the very religious—both men and women, from what they think about when riding the bus to attempting to glimpse the other gender's section at a *simcha*—including their doubts and dissatisfactions with their closed world. As a reader, I felt like a hungry voyeur, eagerly interested in how the ultra-Orthodox go about their everyday lives and loves, hoping that the secular author wrote from research rather than conjecture.

While the dialogue occasionally seems to be in service of explaining Jewish custom, for the most part I was so drawn into this fictional world that I wanted to know how the characters would fare in their new married and divorced lives.

Also based on a marriage is ***The Gallery of Vanished Husbands*** by best-selling author **Natasha Solomon**. The novel stretches through time, but is set primarily in a conservative—but not religious—tight-knit Jewish community in a London suburb in the 1960s. Juliet Montague (a classic "assimilationist" British Jewish name) is a 30-something mother of two, an art gallery owner and an *aguna*, a woman whose husband has disappeared or who refuses to grant her a Jewish divorce, so she remains unmarriable. The title of the book comes from a column that ran in the Jewish Daily Forward, which included photographs of missing husbands in an attempt to track them down. In this case, the title also refers to Julia's opening of her own gallery, as well as to the "gallery" of portraits that hangs in her home, a house that remained suburban and shabby even when she became an avant-garde arbiter of taste. In both these novels, we follow female characters who question and critique their communities and families, but, ultimately, remain Jewish, accepting doubt and ambivalence.

We meet Juliet several years after her Hungarian Holocaust-survivor husband's exit, just as she's beginning an adventure in London's swinging 60s art world. Even more so than Chani Kaufman, Juliet is curious, strong-willed and feisty; she is only slightly uncomfortable in her Jewish world—which sees her as a mild disgrace—and in the aristocratic art world which sees her as a Jew. A confident iconoclast, she is successful and at ease in her new bohemian life, which makes her likable, but one doesn't get the sense that she misses her husband all that much. Because of this, the stakes in the tale at first seem low, the drama centered mainly on art world social life. The tension, however, progresses as Juliet's love affair with an older British artist (inspired by English painter Eric Ravilious) becomes more complicated, her children mature and react—often negatively—to her life choices, and she goes to America to search for her long-lost spouse, a journey which adds mystery and urgency. All along, the reader is seduced by evocative description: "The pale city light melted into a half-

Unaware of their own mediocrity, young people demanded perfection in a spouse.

hearted dawn, a lackluster sun slinking up over the buildings … In Los Angeles daylight gave way to the neon dark of late night drugstores and streetlights and the acid glow of the office buildings."

For me, more interesting than the plight of the aguna here was the theme of post-Holocaust intimacy in the Jewish world. By exploring Juliet's husband's psychology and his previous relationships before the Second World War, the tale subtly explores the way that the war damaged generations of families across continents.

JUDY BATALION *is a writer in New York. She is currently a columnist for the New York Times "Motherlode" blog.*

The Midwife's Narrative

According to midwife-turned-memoirist **Ellen Cohen**, when people hear the word midwife they typically assume that it refers to someone who assists women giving birth at home. But while this is certainly true for some in the profession, Cohen's engaging account of the three decades she spent delivering babies, providing general gynecological care, and educating patients about abortion, contraception and sexuality aims to set the record straight.

"More than 95 percent of midwife deliveries in this country take place in hospitals," she writes. It's a setting Cohen knows well. During her tenure, she worked in both public and private facilities and estimates that she delivered at least 1400 babies, the offspring of the homeless, the HIV-positive, the indigent, the mentally ill and, of course, the perfectly healthy.

One of the most riveting stories she tells in ***Laboring: Stories of a New York City Hospital Midwife*** (self published; available at Amazon, $15.95) involves Mia, a woman diagnosed with schizophrenia who refused to believe that the intense pain she was feeling had anything to do with parturition. "I'm not pregnant," she screamed. "Get your hands away from my pussy…No, I don't use drugs…Just my Thorazine and my crack."

Mia had been taken to the hospital by Emergency Medical Services after she was discovered in a mid-Manhattan subway station. She was terrified. "Mothers feel intense pressure from the baby's head and a burning sensation in the perineum during the moments just before birth," Cohen explains. "Mia must have been feeling that; she jumped over the raised side rails and out of bed, as if that would help her escape the pain, and ran out of the room into the large open area near the nurse's station. After a split second of shocked disbelief, I ran right behind her. Mia leaned against the wall with the next contraction as the baby's head emerged." Cohen encouraged her to crouch down, and an incredulous Mia delivered a healthy baby, subsequently placed with the same relative who was caring for Mia's first-born daughter.

Cohen admits that patients like Mia, while relatively rare, take their toll on staff. Likewise, the unanticipated stillbirths, birth defects, and other complications have a jarring impact on midwives and other medical personnel, underscoring the dangers inherent in pregnancy, no matter how sophisticated the technology or how good the prenatal care.

The story of Tonia is a case in point. Thrilled to be having a girl, Tonia was a young, healthy non-smoker who did not drink or use drugs. Everything was going perfectly, the baby kicking and growing normally. Then, out of nowhere, Tonia developed pre-eclampsia, a serious pregnancy complication that caused the baby to be born 12 weeks early. The infant later died, and Cohen's description is heart-rending.

That said, all is not grim, and *Laboring* includes dozens of joyful anecdotes. At the same time, Cohen reports encounters with arrogant, sexist physicians and pig-headed bureaucrats. She also chronicles several just-in-the-nick-of-time actions by helpful maintenance people—the usually unheralded workers who keep health centers running smoothly. What's more, while the book does not directly tackle deficits in the healthcare system, it addresses—and condemns—the high rate of Caesarian deliveries in the United States.

Cohen notes that midwives are trained to let nature take its course, and the profession favors a "high touch, low tech" approach over a "high-tech, no touch" medical model for women about to give birth. "Pregnancy," Cohen concludes, "is not a disease. Midwives trust birth rather than trying to control it. Science supports this approach."

And if it takes longer than one might like? Cohen acknowledges that labor follows neither formula nor game plan. "We do not view the normal mainly as preparation for the interesting complication," she writes. "The ordinary miracle of life is interesting enough."

ELEANOR J. BADER *is a writer and teacher whose work appears on Truthout.org, RHRealityCheck.org, Theasy.com and in The Brooklyn Rail and other progressive feminist magazines and blogs.*

She delivered at least 1400 babies, the offspring of the homeless, the HIV-positive, the indigent, the mentally ill and, of course, the perfectly healthy.

Powerful Intimacies in Both Old Country and New

In ***The Scent of Pine***, a new novel by the celebrated writer **Lara Vapnyar**, a struggling college lecturer away from her husband and children at an academic conference falls into an uncharacteristic affair with a charismatic and successful

professor. Already long alienated from her floundering marriage, Lena finds surprising intimacy in the affair and begins to plumb her personal history as the budding relationship loosens her inhibitions and lethargy.

Two unfolding stories are skillfully interwoven—the illicit present-day romance between Lena and Ben in New England, and Lena's coming-of-age at summer camp in the Soviet Union, which she recounts to Ben in intimate detail over the course of their tryst. Yet, "The camp story will be over sooner or later. As will the story of Lena and Ben. If only she could learn some of Scheherazade's storytelling magic and make it last," Lena thinks to herself. A lingering mystery from summer camp days emerges through Lena's narration, connecting the story and the storyteller across time and space.

The UnAmericans, a debut short story collection by the young and talented **Molly Antopol**, covers similar geographic terrain. Ranging across Eastern Europe, America and Israel, each short story has a sharp poignancy, a surprisingly bittersweet vulnerability.

In "The Old World," a well-intentioned second marriage comes up deeply, heartbreakingly short. The disappointed disappointing husband wonders, "How had I let myself become just another sad old man at a table for one?" In "Minor Heroics," sibling rivalry and sibling love overlap and intertwine on kibbutz. Oren has always envied and admired his older brother Assaf—but when Assaf is severely wounded in a tractor accident the roles are reversed, and Oren can't bear his own newfound dominance over his brother. In "Retrospective," Mira's marriage may or may not be disintegrating—coinciding with the death of her domineering, withholding, fabulously wealthy grandmother. She cries to her husband, "You don't understand what it's like to be with someone who exists so fully in his head. Who has no desire to leave our weird little cocoon."

In both *The UnAmericans* and ***The Scent of Pine***, the authors employ a deceptive simplicity in their writing. The tropes, the dialogue—even the archetypal characters—are in some ways familiar, bordering even on predictable. The ambiance and appeal of Eastern Europe, and of Eastern European descendants in America, are also well-trodden fiction terrain (thanks in no small part to the success of Vapnyar and her thriving cohort).

"You don't understand what it's like to be with someone who exists so fully in his head. Who has no desire to leave our weird little cocoon."

Yet Antopol and Vapynar share a deep and devastating gift for eliciting extraordinary emotional reaction from the recognizable intimacies of relationships. The sharp pain of suddenly seeing a parent's weakness exposed, the bright starkness of a partner's insecurity or disregard, the thrill of sexual conquest—these fundamental experiences are conveyed in such bare, compelling, unaffected voice that it is virtually impossible not to recognize yourself in every different character in these two excellent books. The familiar territory of the books makes the unexpected emotional impact of the stories all the stronger.

SONIA ISARD *is a Lilith contributing editor.*

Peacebuilding

Jewish tradition and communities have apparent dichotomies regarding conflict: Traditionally, Jews tend toward disagreement and disputation, but have an equal passion for peace. And while Jews are idealistic about their role in the redemption of the world—by exemplifying civility and the harmonious rule of law—they can also be deeply at odds with each other in any argument that touches on the issue of Jewish survival. Need these things really be in conflict?"

In ***From Enemy to Friend: Jewish Wisdom and the Pursuit of Peace*** (Orbis Books, $25), Rabbi **Amy Eilberg**, the first woman ordained as a Conservative rabbi, looks to the rabbinic ideal of controversy "for the sake of Heaven," in which ideas are opposed for a higher purpose. In such disputes, respect for one's opponent is maintained, minimizing the dangers of polarization and ruptured relationships. And in our tradition conflict is not a purely negative phenomenon. As one example, she gives the view of Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav that disagreement is like the kabbalistic "self-contraction" of God, which made space for the world to be created. Conflict theory presents much the same idea: that in the disjunction and distance created by "constructive conflict" new solutions to problems can arise. Conflict is therefore not the enemy of peace, but in fact can be its generator since, as Eilberg notes, peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a condition of wholeness in the world.

Conflict is thus an opportunity (admittedly one with built-in hazards). In its presence, people can either build on, or destroy, relationships, depending on which human traits come to the fore. Thus the religious aspect of Eilberg's distillation includes not only outward action, but also an inward discipline in the form of *mussar* (a system of Jewish moral discipline beginning in the 10th century), to cultivate "peacebuilding" responses to conflict, rather than unproductively defensive or angry reactions.

The term "peacebuilding" normally refers to the work done by civil leaders to create favorable conditions for official "peacemaking" (the latter being the purview of diplomats and other government professionals). However, Eilberg argues that the peacebuilding is something anyone can do: interpersonally, within and

HOW JEWISH TEXTS CAN HELP WOMEN — RABBIS INCLUDED — THROUGH TRYING TRANSITIONS

Rabbi-editors **Sue Levi Elwell** and **Nancy Fuchs Kreimer** invited women rabbis, scholars and activists to share the Jewish texts they have found themselves applying in their own lives. The contributors to ***Chapters of the Heart: Jewish Women Sharing the Torah of Our Lives*** (Cascade Books, $26) include Julie Greenberg, Judith Plaskow, Blu Greenberg and Wendy Zierler. Rabbi Hara Person writes of raising a son and finding wisdom in stories of the biblical King David. Rabbi Rachel Adler observes her mother's cognitive slide into forgetting, and the book of Lamentations is Adler's benchmark. Rabbi Laura Geller looks back many decades to her divorce, examining it through the lens of Sarah and Abraham setting out on a journey when they were no longer young. And here is Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg on coming to a mature understanding of her professional role:

> As a congregational rabbi I felt great pressure to be someone who was always interested in others. Always. The truth is I was not always interested. I also had to demonstrate how "spiritual," "deep," "serious and seriously Jewish" I am. Especially as someone in the early wave of female rabbis, I felt so compelled to get it right. Shoring up a persona of "spiritual" has a grave downside, like any persona—intellectual, manager, healer, etc. So much energy is invested in the persona, the false God, that the true God, the true life force, one's unique passion, is concealed, and at worst, even buried alive....
>
> At the Passover seder we are invited to lay back on super comfortable chairs or to just "lounge around." Reclining as free people counters restlessness. We place the body in a position of repose, in a place of faith and trust. This posture opens a door to relaxing the fretting brow and the urge to pace the floor. When I am relaxed in my body, my mind is relaxed as well. I have a chance to ponder relationships, causes and consequences. I have the opportunity to live purposefully at whatever stage of life.

In the new book ***Kaddish: Women's Voices*** (Urim, $27.95) editors **Michal Smart** and **Barbara Ashkenas** gather 52 reflections on the experience of mourning. Belda Lindenbaum writes here, "For some women it is no longer a lonely experience. Still, the road to understanding women's spiritual needs and making room for them, both figuratively and physically, is a long one, and we have barely begun the journey. Most of the liturgy is wonderfully poetic. A phrase that is dear to me appears in the morning prayers; *You have changed my mourning into dancing/You have removed my sackcloth and girded me with joy/So that I might praise You and not remain silent/God, my God, forever will I thank You.* Is this not a paradigm for loss and acceptance? For me, it also speaks to women's need to be seen and heard within Judaism. If God sees us and hears us, and acknowledges us as part of God's community, then where is man?"

between communities, with those from different faith traditions, and even—in a modest but significant way—with those considered serious adversaries.

In addition to an account of her own experience with interreligious dialogue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and dialogue between Jews on Israel, Eilberg brings to her discussion of conflict and peace in the Jewish tradition a wealth of rabbinic insight. Her analysis is not, however, dominated by a scholarly perspective. Nor, in her examination of conflict in and involving the Jewish community, does she allow her understanding of conflict or communications theory to predominate. Eilberg brings them together, as a practical answer to the commandment of Psalm 34 to "seek peace and pursue it," creating a useful guide for the Jewish peacebuilder.

Like Eilberg, Penny Rosenwasser, in ***Hope Into Practice: Jewish Women Choosing Justice Despite Our Fears***, (AK Press, $21.95) notes that overriding fear for Jewish survival can impede the fulfillment of our obligations to others. Eilberg sees this fearfulness as an obstacle in relating to our adversaries' concerns; Rosenwasser cites it as leading to an ethno- or religiocentric "Is it good for the Jews?" mentality, one obstacle to the generosity needed to pursue justice.

Rosenwasser's remedy begins with awareness of the damage done to us as a people. She lays out a concise history of anti-Semitism (and its different faces), climaxing with the Holocaust and the legacy of trauma and fear from which many still suffer. Rosenwasser explores how the fear engendered by anti-Semitism and related oppressions such as racism, sexism and homophobia, can affect the ways

Jews view themselves. She takes the position that greater concern for others is the natural result of healing one's defensive stance, achieving healthy self-love.

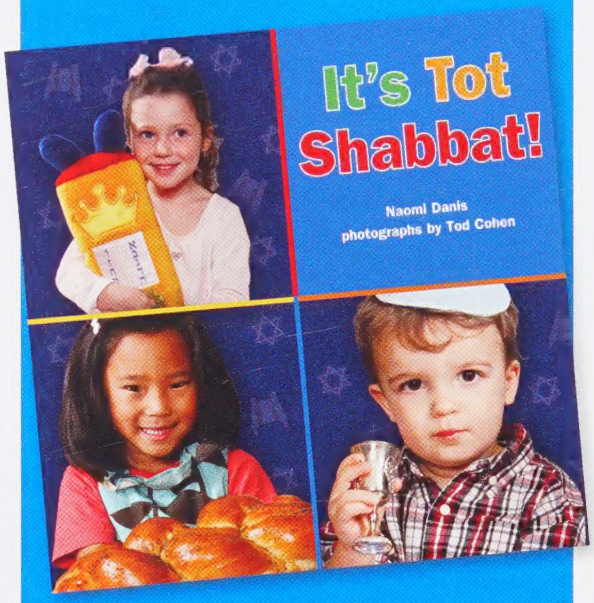
While Eilberg notes the opposition of some of her colleagues, her work can likely speak comfortably to a range of readers. Rosenwasser's book, though, is likely to raise hackles to her right. She is outspoken on behalf of justice for the Palestinian people, and her characterization of that conflict is in places still inaccurate and one-sided. However, her account of her own activism is compelling, particularly her certainty that anti-Semitism, in addition to being an abuse that must be identified, is an obstacle in the Jewish struggle for the human rights of others.

Rosenwasser, between two extremes, says, in essence (to the left, pro-Palestinian crowd): "If you're not standing up for yourself as a Jew by identifying anti-Semitism, and rooting out the internalized kind, you're missing the credibility you need to advocate effectively for others," and (to the "Is it good for the Jews?" crowd): "If you're so focused on anti-Semitism that you're advocating only for yourself, you're not pursuing justice."

This book may show many on the left the historical reasons for Israel's defensive stance, as well as highlighting the dangers of demonization for those on both sides of the question. She describes some who learned, from their experience of the Shoah, a sensitivity for the oppressed, rather than seeing themselves primarily as victims and potential victims. Consequently, it is curious that she does not emphasize the role of Jews' having internalized the message of our foundational story of trauma and liberation, the Exodus: That rulers and slaves are made of the same stuff; that when we have privilege our only "safety"—and that of others—lies in refraining from the abuse of power, and fighting oppression and injustice wherever we find it.

RABBI CHANA THOMPSON SHOR *is a Conservative rabbi, the first woman* mesader gittin *(preparer of Jewish religious divorce), a Judaic fabric artist, and a writer.*

"While the grown-ups pray, in another room the children play. This is my Shabbat Club."



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Naomi Danis

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Headpieces for Peace

Here's a witty installation with a video and stylized headpieces representing iconic women's gear: a nun, a religious Jewish wife, a Muslim woman, an astronaut. Described by its creator, Columbian-born artist Jessica Sofia Mitrani, as "a non hierarchical, nomadic organization on a tandem bicycle that seeks to initiate free political action. Recently on view in New York, before that in Tel Aviv, and available for travel. *jessicasofiamitrani.com*

Dare to Use the F-Word

A monthly podcast series from Barnard College and its Center for Research on Women tells the story of today's young feminists through the ideas, art, and activism that define them. Listen to a conversation with Barnard President Debora Spar about her book *Wonder Women: Sex, Power & the Quest for Perfection*, about women's struggles for perfection in every area of their lives, with millennial feminist Jamia Wilson. *Barnard.edu/podcasts/perfection*

Feminist Jewish Ethics

How can Judaism and feminism be reconciled? Count the ways! A comprehensive new article on Jewish feminist ethics does just that. Michal Raucher, a doctoral candidate at Northwestern University, created it for Wikipedia, in a joint project with her students. Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler, Blu Greenberg, Tamar Ross and Tova Hartman are featured as key thinkers on such topics as feminist ethical approaches to traditional Jewish texts, theology and Jewish practice. Like all Wikipedia entries, this one is open to contributions and improvements from readers. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_Jewish_Ethics*

Ways We Memorialize

Celebrities and noncelebrities are interviewed by authors Meryl Ain, her husband Stewart Ain and brother Arthur Fischman in their book *The Living Memories Project: Legacies That Last*. Included is performer and playwright Ellen Gould, who wrote her play *Bubbe Meises, Bubbe Stories* as a way to resolve the untimely passing of two siblings and to pay tribute to her deceased grandmothers. A chapter honors the founders of Jewish Savannah. Contribute to a second volume; submit your story to: LivingMemoriesProject@gmail.com. *facebook.com/LivingMemoriesProject*

Jews & Mid-Century Modernism

Discover the role of mid 20th-century Jewish architects, designers, and artists in the creation of a new American domestic landscape in an exhibit featuring modern household items from furniture and textiles to dinnerware and serving utensils. The exhibition highlights such well-known designers as Anni Albers, Joseph Eichler, and Richard Neutra, as well as critically overlooked ones like Ruth Adler Schnee, Marguerite Wildenhain, and Alex Steinweiss, also patrons, merchants, and media figures who disseminated this modern aesthetic to a broad audience. At the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco from April 24 through October 6, 2014. *thecjm.org*

Skilled Volunteers for Israel

Teachers, university faculty, business consultants, photographers, social workers, Jewish communal professionals, archivists, scientists, translators, and other experienced professionals can find meaningful skilled volunteer opportunities helping meet the critical needs of the Israeli nonprofit sector via this organization founded and directed by Marla Gamoran. A commitment of one month is expected and volunteers fund all expenses. *Skillvolunteerisrael.org*

Body Traces

Jewish sculptor and proto-feminist Alina Szapocznikow—born in Kalisz in 1926, and died in Paris in 1973—was one of Poland's outstanding post-WWII artists. Before her death at 47, she traded the language of classical sculpture for an idiosyncratic lexicon of new shapes, and unusual materials, processes and themes. Surviving the Holocaust and battles with tuberculosis and cancer, she expanded the definition of sculpture while casting parts of her own body in testimony to its deterioration. Through May 31, 2014 at the Tel Aviv Art Museum. *tamuseum.org.il*

Life-Saving Breast Milk

Mothers from the U.S., Canada and Mexico can donate their extra breast milk to stock nonprofit breast-milk banks that provide pasteurized milk to fragile and sick infants, thus improving their potential to survive and thrive. All donors undergo a screening process that begins with a short telephone interview, and the costs of screening and shipping are typically covered by the receiving milk bank. More info at Milk Banking Association of North America. *hmbana.org/milk-bank-locations*

SCULPTURE (LEFT) COURTESY OF TEL AVIV MUSEUM

Esther Broner

Esther Broner (1927–2011), with Israeli feminist Naomi Nimrod, researched and wrote *The Women's Haggadah* for the women's seders first held in 1976—one in New York City with an English text and another in Haifa in Hebrew. This new film by Lilly Rivlin documents the evolution of these seders over 35 years. Along with her "seder sisters"—among them feminist luminaries like Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, Marilyn French, Grace Paley, Vivian Gornick, Carol Jenkins and Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Broner developed feminist interpretations of traditional texts, including a feminist version of the plagues and a narrative of Miriam, Moses's sister. Rivlin's film also features Broner herself (who wrote as E.M. Broner), reciting from her classic novel *A Weave of Women*. *www.estherbronerthefilm.com*

Women Drawing Talmud

Feminist artists Jacqueline Nicholls, above left, and Yonah Lavery-Yisraeli, above right, integrate pop-culture sensibility with serious investigation of Talmudic dilemmas in an exhibit titled, "Tosafot," referring to the medieval commentators on the Talmud and representing a continuation of the tradition of adding to the Talmudic text. The artists take the liberty to imagine the physical setting, the scenery, the clothing, and much more that does not actually appear in the written text. Until April 22 at the Ein Harod Museum. *museumeinharod.org.il/english*

Resource Generation

Organizing young people with wealth to leverage resources and privilege for social change is the goal of this evolving nonprofit, founded as "Comfort Zone" in 1997. They hold events like "Making Money Make Change Conference" and "Creating Change Through Family Philanthropy Retreat." Resources on their website support cross-class relationships, and a recently posted blog "Giving More, Praying More" by Jessica Rosenberg tells of her Friday afternoon ritual of making online charitable gifts while baking challah, before she turns her computer off for Shabbat. *Resourcegeneration.org*

Campers with Disabilities

The much-heralded Ramah camps have consolidated their ongoing programs open to Jewish children, teens, and young adults with a wide range of learning, developmental, cognitive and social disabilities. Campers with disabilities participate in activities with other campers throughout the camp. These interactions provide an exceptional benefit to the entire Ramah community by fostering a heightened sensitivity toward individual differences. The National Ramah Tikvah Network is also an incubator for young Jewish professionals who are motivated and trained to work with individuals with disabilities in the Jewish community. *campramah.org/content/specialneeds*

A Tombstone, a Ghost, a Film

Ghila Valabrega is an Italian-American Jewish filmmaker whose first work, "Felice Nel Box," is a short comedy based on a true family story of her dad, a stolen tombstone from Sabbioneta in northern Italy, and a Jewish ghost from 1800 named Felice. Valabrega is launching a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to complete the post-production of the film and to help restore the synagogue of Sabbioneta, which was severely damaged by an earthquake in 2012. *ghilavalabrega.com*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

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JEWISH FILMMAKING—CURSE OR CALLING?

by AMY STONE

IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO TO JEWISH FILM FESTIVALS. It could turn you into a Jewish filmmaker.

One Jewish film's OK, but two? You're on dangerous ground.

Back in 2005, Diana Groó, Hungarian filmmaker, was in Amsterdam to show her first feature, "Miracle in Krakow," at the Jewish film festival. When Rabbi Elisa Klaphek approached her to make a film on Regina Jonas, the world's first woman rabbi (ordained in Berlin in 1935) and the subject of a biography Klaphek had written, Groó resisted. '"My first feature was Jewish. I wanted to make something different."

Her next film, "Vespa," was a road film about a 10-year-old Roma boy who rides a motor scooter from the countryside to Budapest. It's a mix of documentary and fiction. Groó, who characterizes herself as part of the artistic underground, knows she's not going to win establishment friends in Hungary as she keeps gravitating toward sensitive social issues. She says that Roma (once called Gypsies), Jews and homosexuals are today the main targets for Hungarian neo-Nazis and nationalists.

By the time Groó got interested in Rabbi Regina Jonas, all those who knew Jonas—and whom Klaphek had interviewed—were no longer alive. But Groó did it—without "expert" talking heads or slow pans over documents. "Regina" is, in the filmmaker's words, "a poetic documentary." It's based on a single photograph and a trove of letters and newspaper clippings Jonas had safeguarded from the Nazis. (See "Meet on Screen the First Woman Rabbi," *http://lilith.org/blog*) Not just Groó's calling card at Jewish film festivals, "Regina" was also screened at the UNESCO Palace in Paris for this year's International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

It's hard to believe Groó, born in 1973, needs to keep proving that she's not afraid to be Jewish.

She and her identical twin sister grew up in Budapest, where their own Jewish history was never discussed. At 10, they were determined to find out their family story from their maternal grandmother, who had survived four concentration camps. "One of my first memories, at the age of four, was seeing the number from Auschwitz on my grandmother's arm." Their own mother only found out at age eight—from Jewish classmates—that she was Jewish. Groó's parents' generation "got a kind of silence. My grandparents' generation stopped talking about their Judaism. They just decided to start a new life and tried to save us from the past."

Groó speaks of herself as part of the traumatized third generation. "We broke the silence," she says. "We wanted to know everything." Groó was 17 when she first fasted on Yom Kippur. "It wasn't for religious reasons," she says. "My grandmother was 17 when she was deported. She came from a big family and was the only one who survived. Fasting was the minimum I could do." And now—"I want to be a proud Jew, but I'm always reminded in a negative way that I am Jewish." She's received hate mail, and quotes one letter: "You are a dirty Jew who makes film and humiliates Hungarian blood. You are betraying the country."

With responses like that, what will her next film be? After the meticulously researched documentary "Regina," she had wanted to make a feature film on the life of Rabbi Jonas. The story has everything –defiance, impoverished beginnings, a brilliant mind, an almost mystical call to the religious life, guts and determination, and, at the end, true love in the shadow of the Holocaust.

"I want to be a proud Jew, but I'm always reminded in a negative way that I am Jewish."

But modern Hungary is pushing Groó into what she considers a more urgent subject. She doesn't mince words: "I live in a country where neo-Nazis in military uniform march on the streets and the current right-wing government does not stand up against racism. Choosing a Jewish topic comes always from a painful feeling, that I lost something from the past, or the stories simply find me and I cannot resist."

She accuses her native land of continuing to deny its past: "Hungary was one of the last countries, in 1944, in the last minute, that offered its Jews to the Nazis. Hungary is still one of the countries not able to face its history. What's missing is education."

Lest there be doubt, at Easter time two years ago, a member of the extreme right in Parliament dragged up the 1883 blood libel against Jews accused of killing a Hungarian peasant girl. The MP, Zsolt Baráth, was accused of anti-Semitism and urged to resign for criticizing the 19th century verdict that found the Jews innocent. This is not enough for Groó: "One hundred and thirty years after this false accusation, it can't happen again. I decided to make a film about the lawyer who defended the Jewish people. I want to open people's eyes to what really happened."

What film would she make if she had an unlimited budget and could pick any subject? She pauses. "I'd probably make the films I'm making right now." ■

Amy Stone is a founding mother of Lilith and blogs at Lilith.org/blog.